

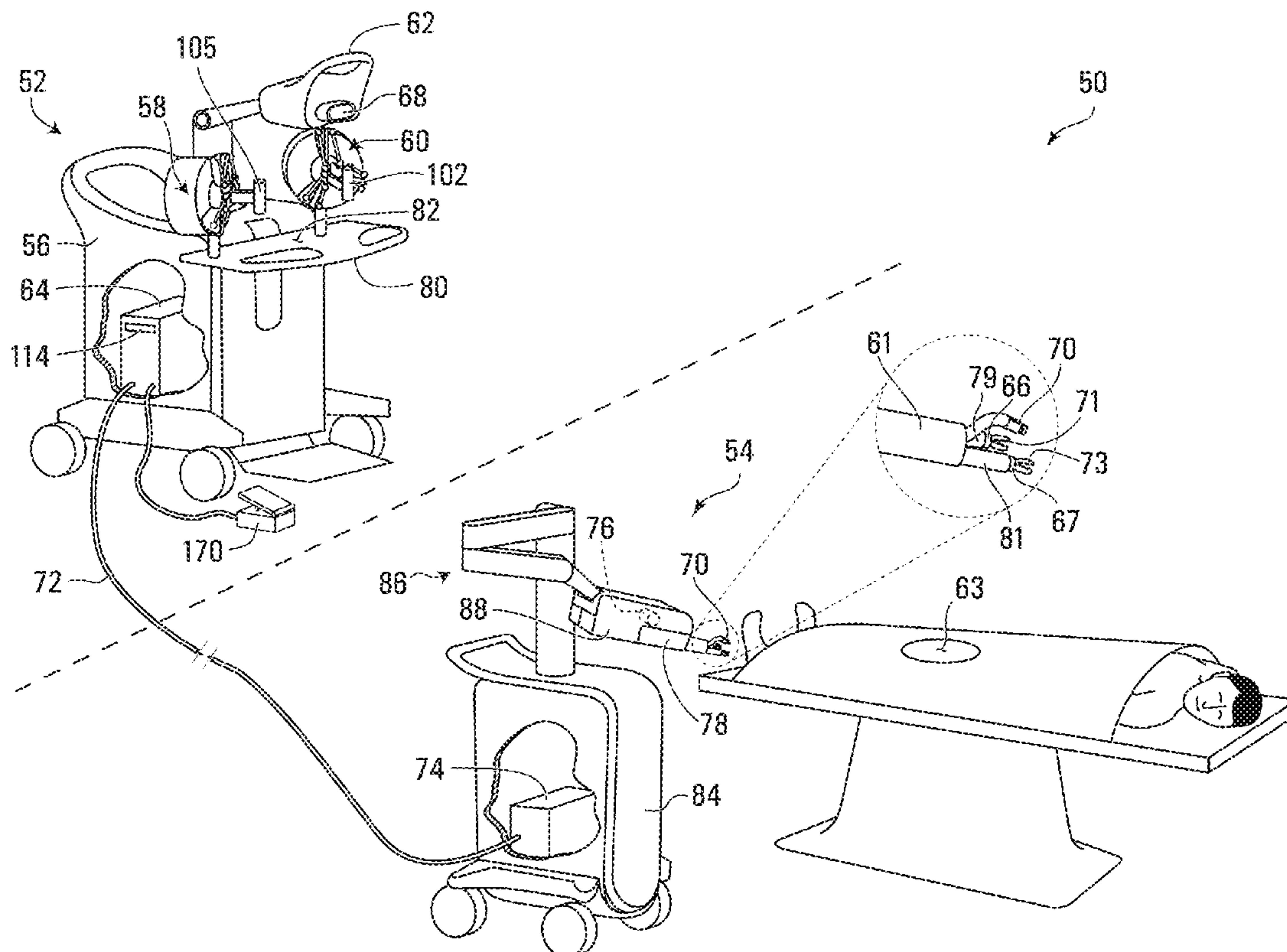
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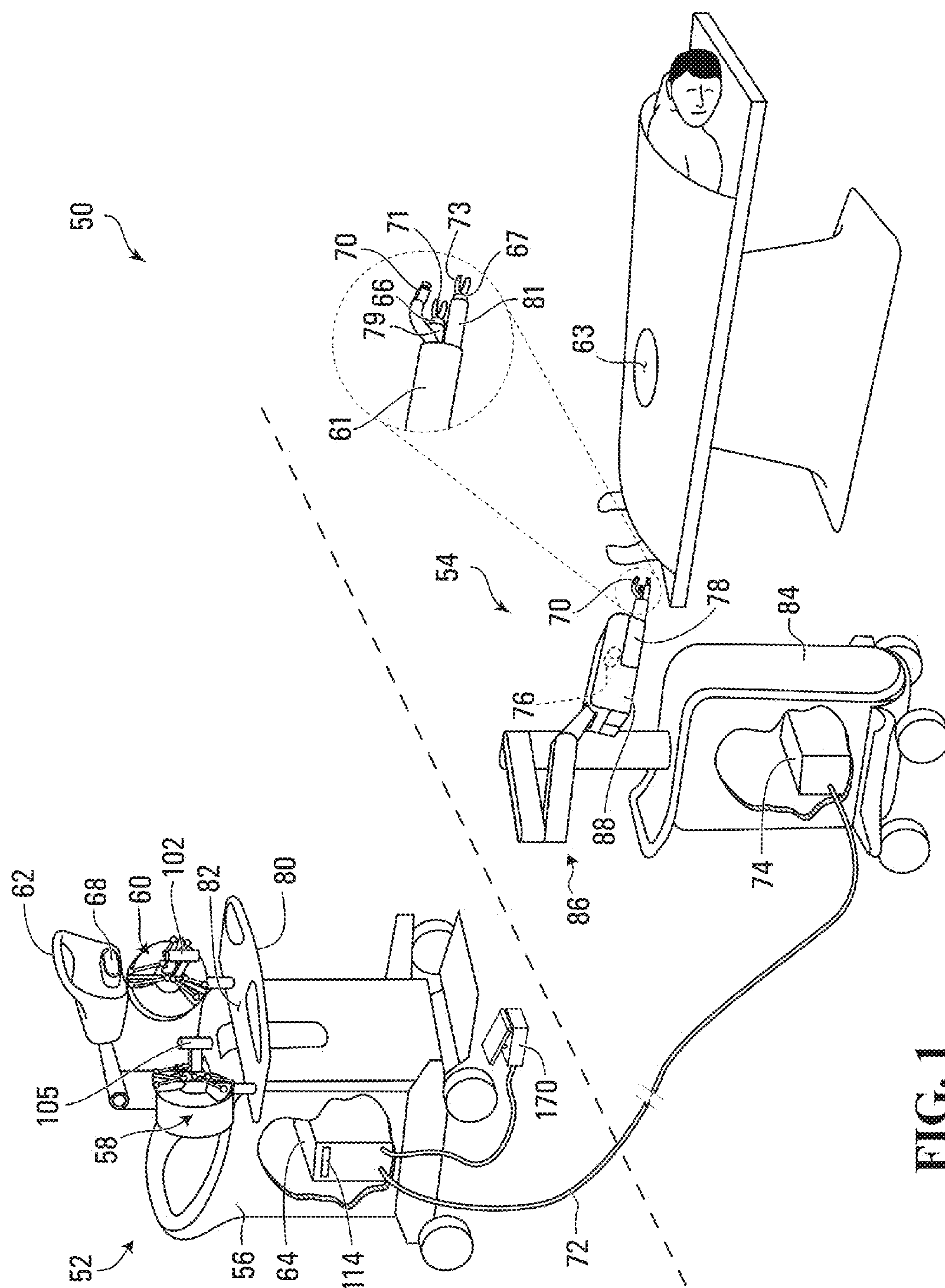
(19) **United States**(12) **Patent Application Publication**
CAMERON(10) **Pub. No.: US 2018/0132956 A1**(43) **Pub. Date: May 17, 2018**(54) **INSTRUMENT COLLISION DETECTION
AND FEEDBACK**(71) Applicant: **TITAN MEDICAL INC.**, Toronto,
Ontario (CA)(72) Inventor: **Peter CAMERON**, Menlo Park, CA
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(2016.02); **A61B 34/76** (2016.02); **A61B**
2017/00123 (2013.01); **B25J 3/04** (2013.01);
B25J 9/1676 (2013.01); **B25J 9/1689**
(2013.01); **B25J 13/025** (2013.01)(57) **ABSTRACT**

A method of operating a robotic control system comprising a master apparatus in communication with a plurality of input devices having respective handles capable of translational and rotational movement and a slave system having a tool positioning device corresponding to each respective handle and holding a respective tool having an end effector whose position and orientation is determined in response to a position and orientation of a corresponding handle. The method involves producing desired new end effector positions and orientations of respective end effectors in response to current positions and current orientations of corresponding handles. using the desired new end effector positions and orientations to determine distances from each point of a first plurality of points along a first tool positioning device to each point of a plurality of points along at least one other tool positioning device, and determining and notifying that any of the distances meets a proximity criterion.





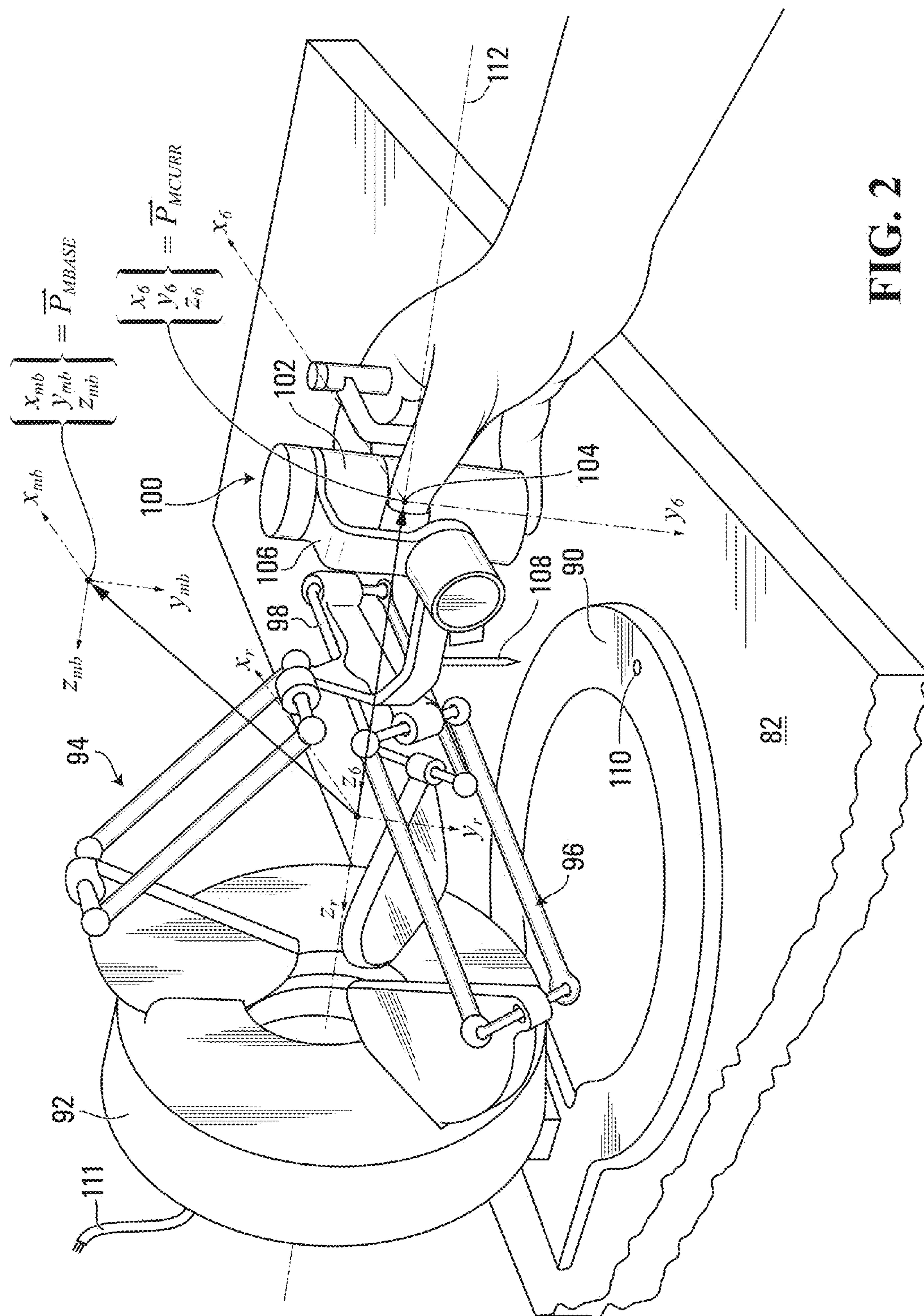


FIG. 2

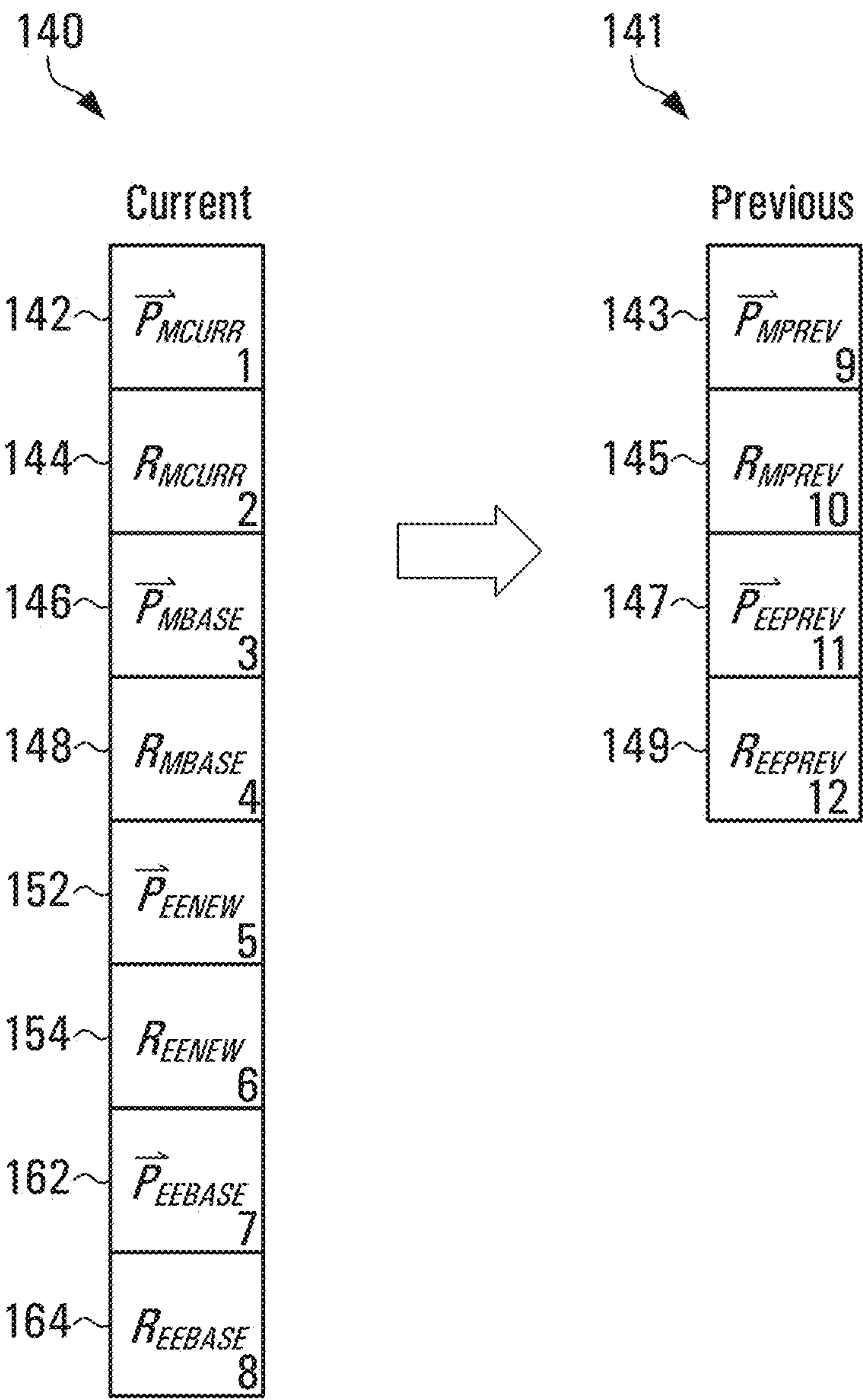
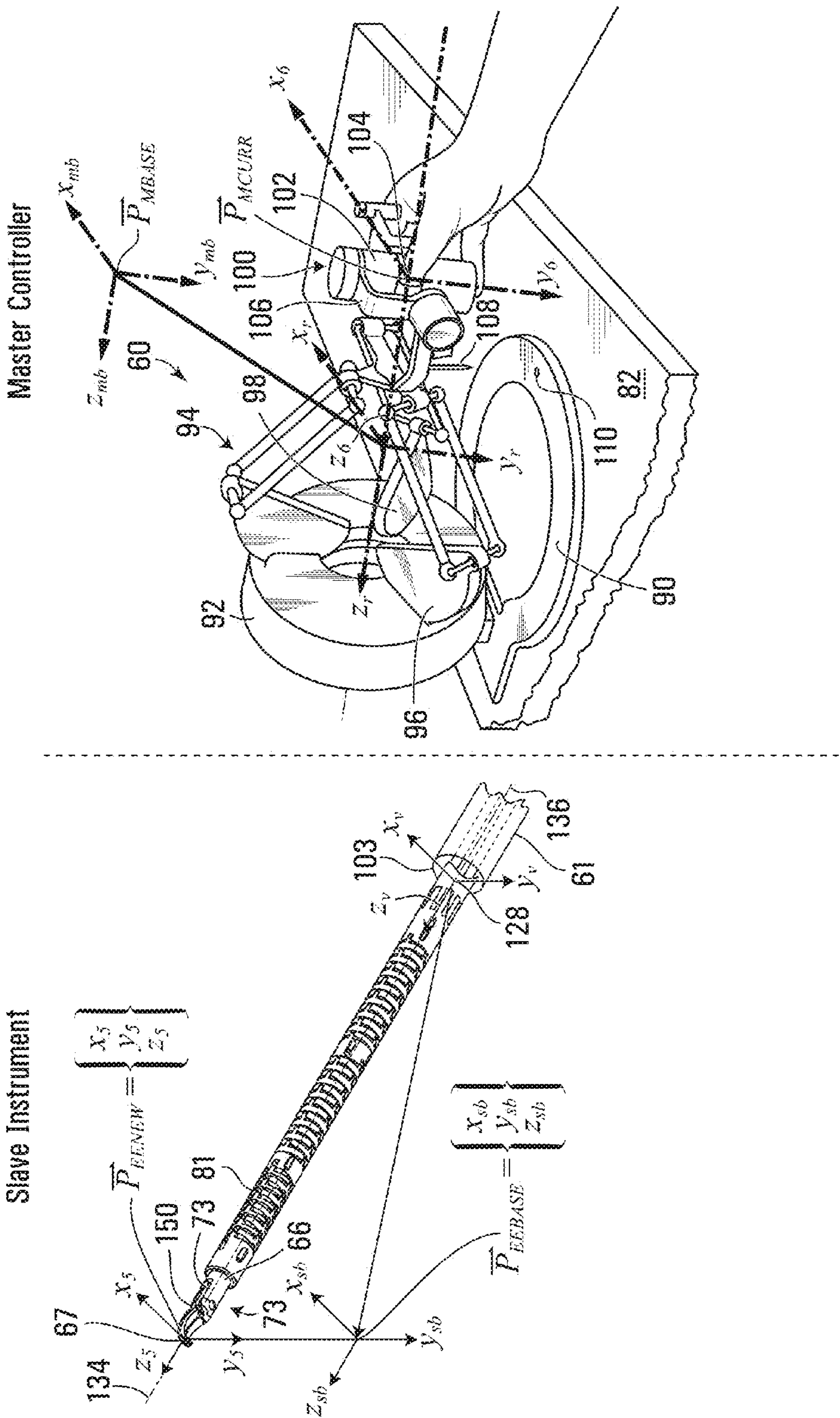


FIG. 3



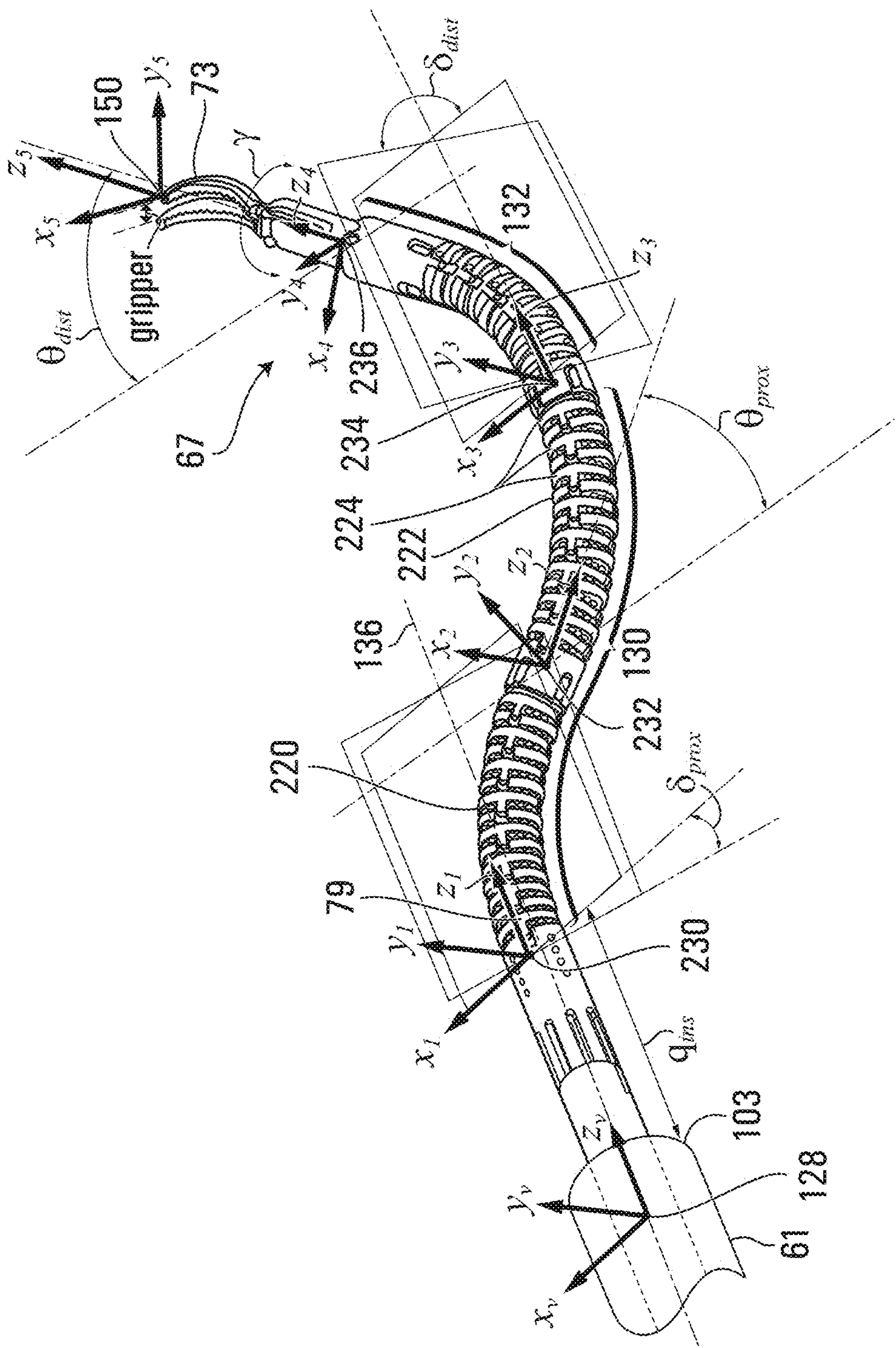


FIG. 5

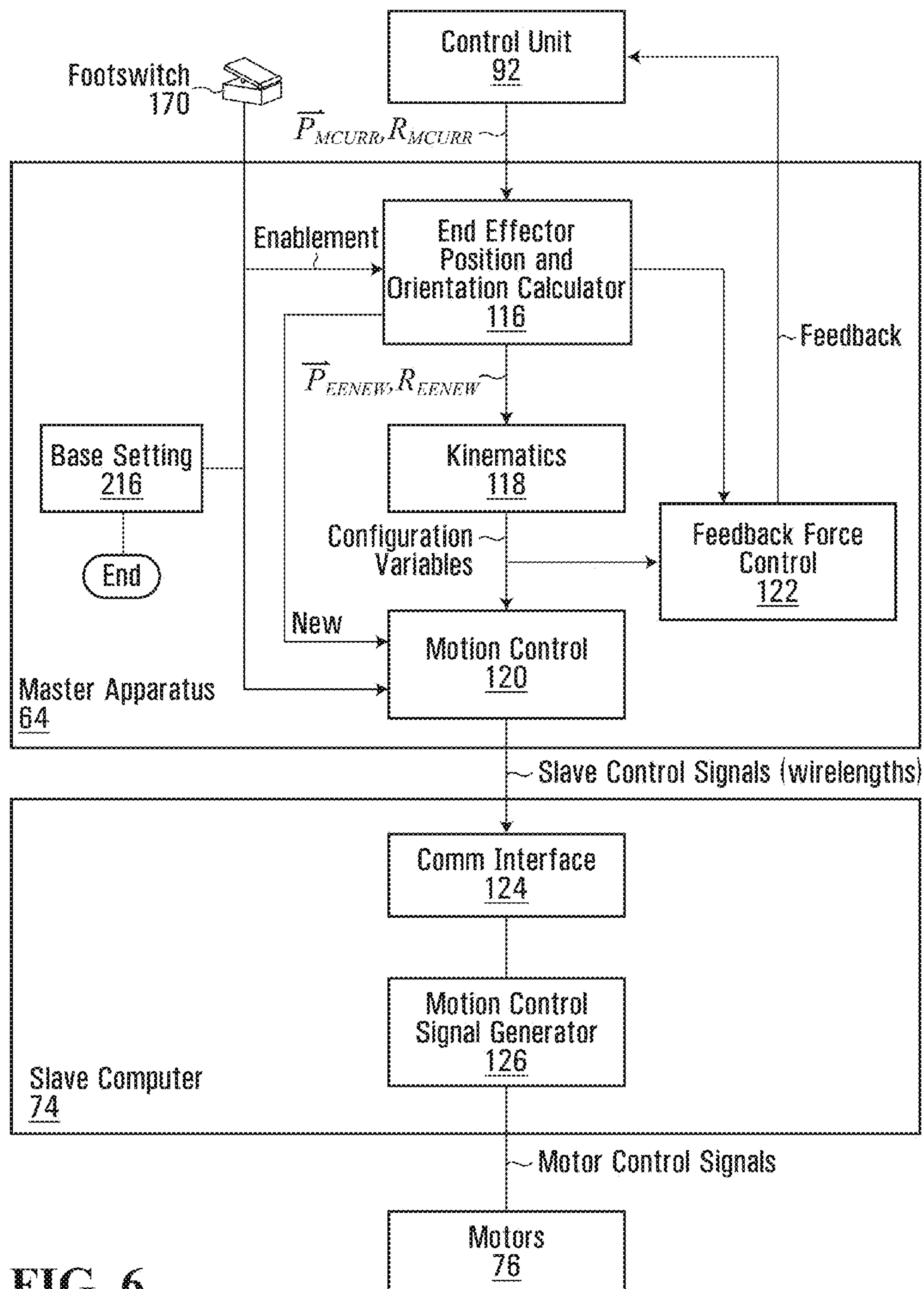
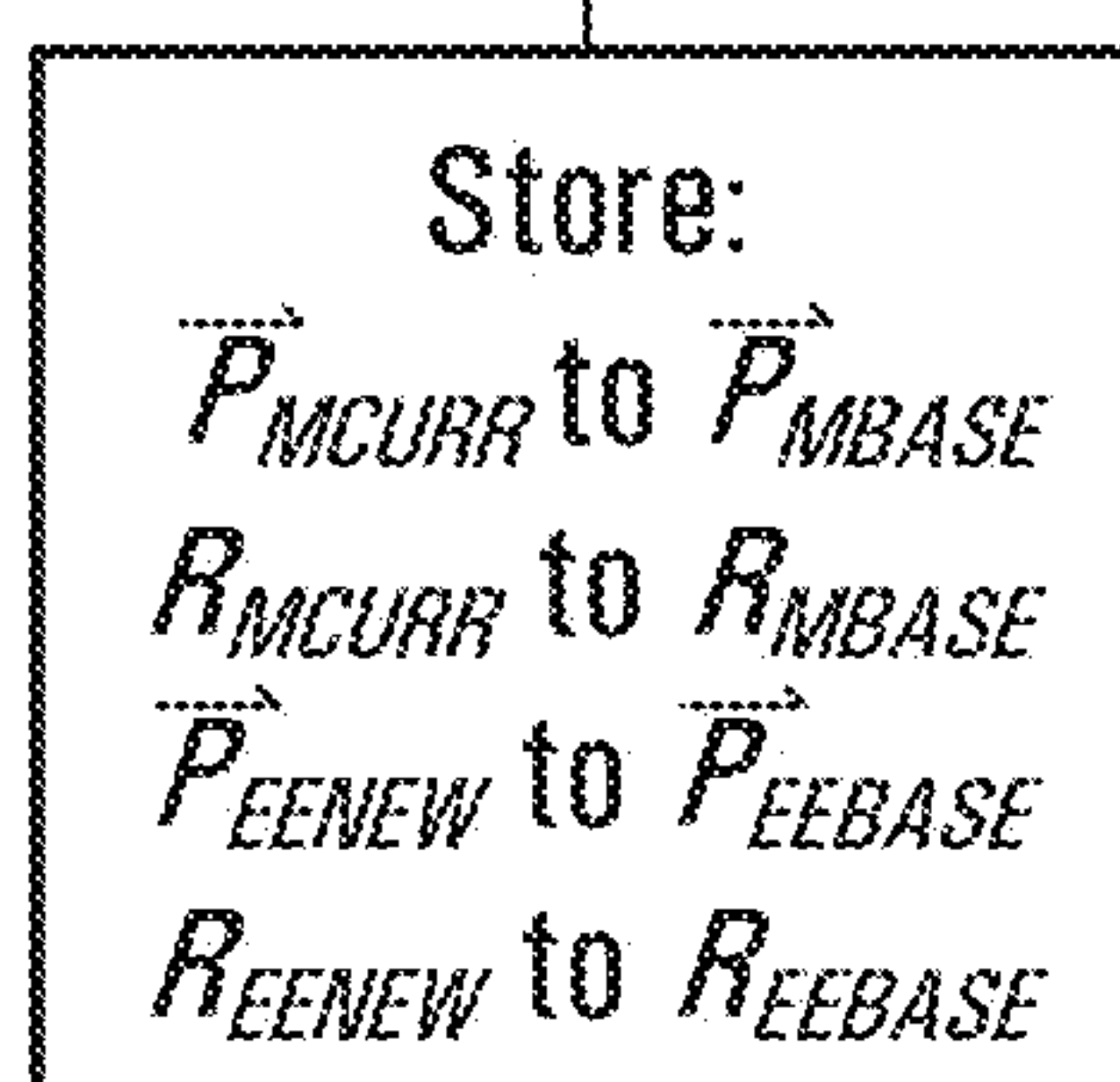


FIG. 6

216
↙

Enablement Signal Transition Inactive → Active



End

FIG. 7

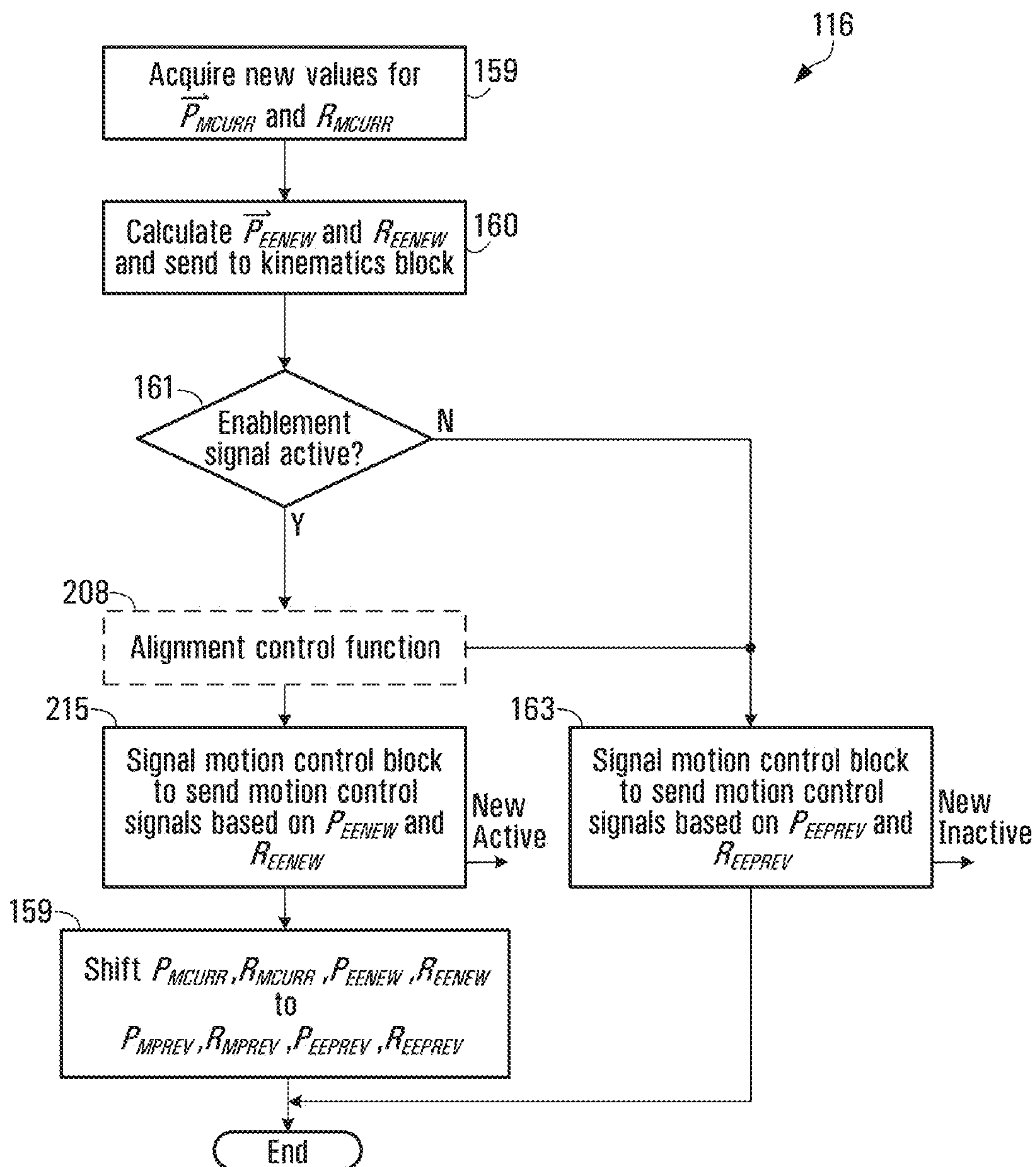


FIG. 8

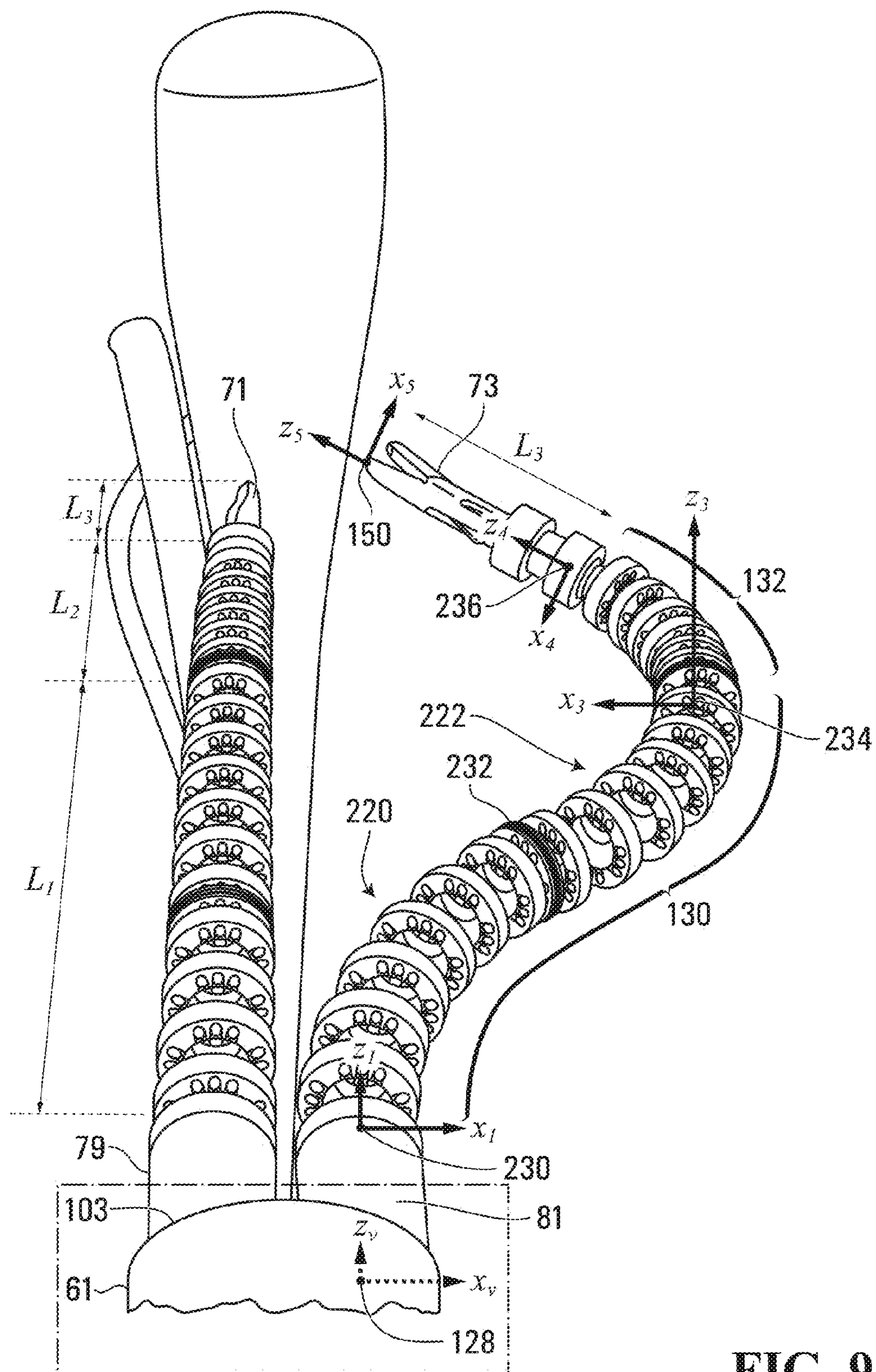


FIG. 9

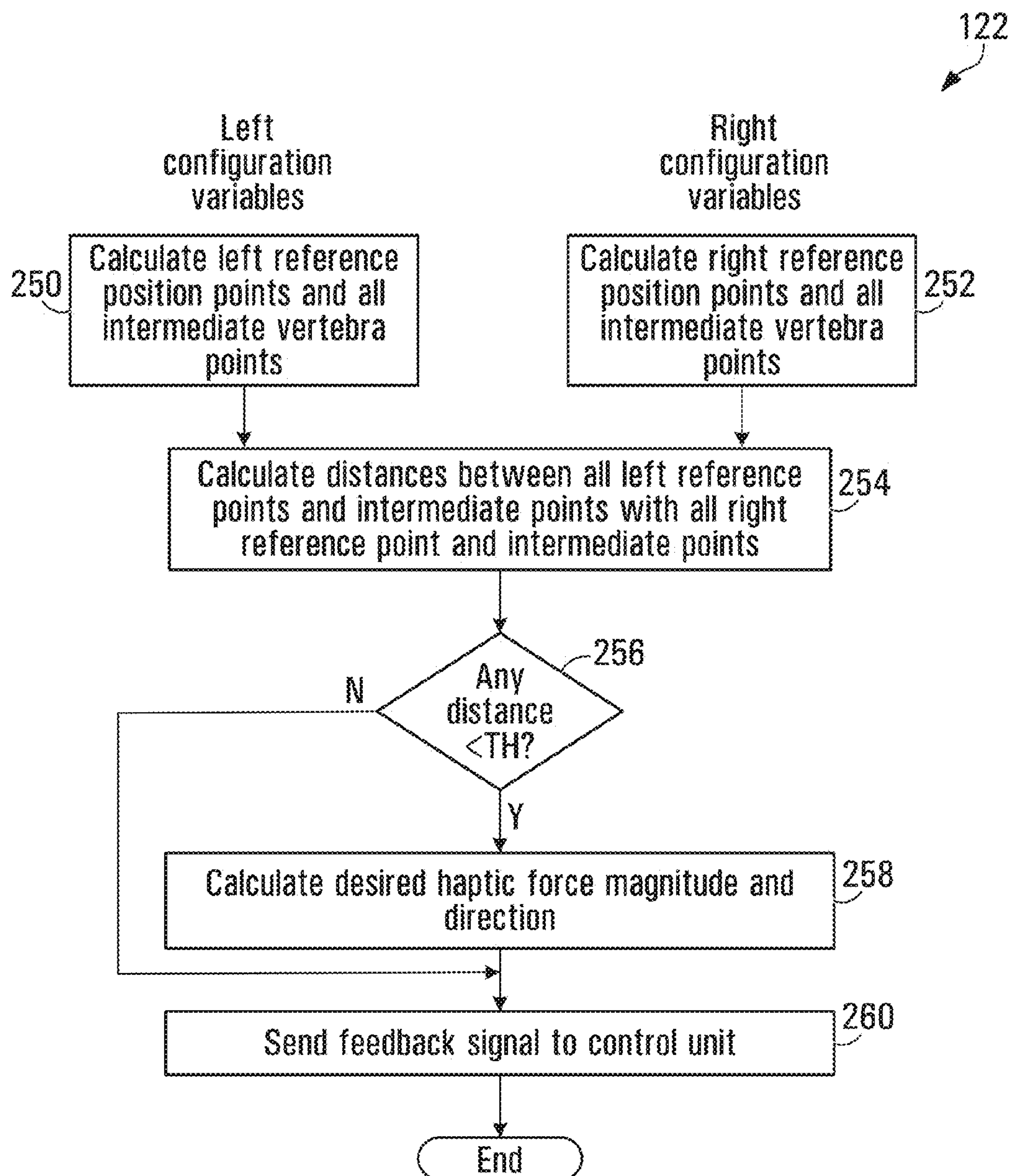


FIG. 10

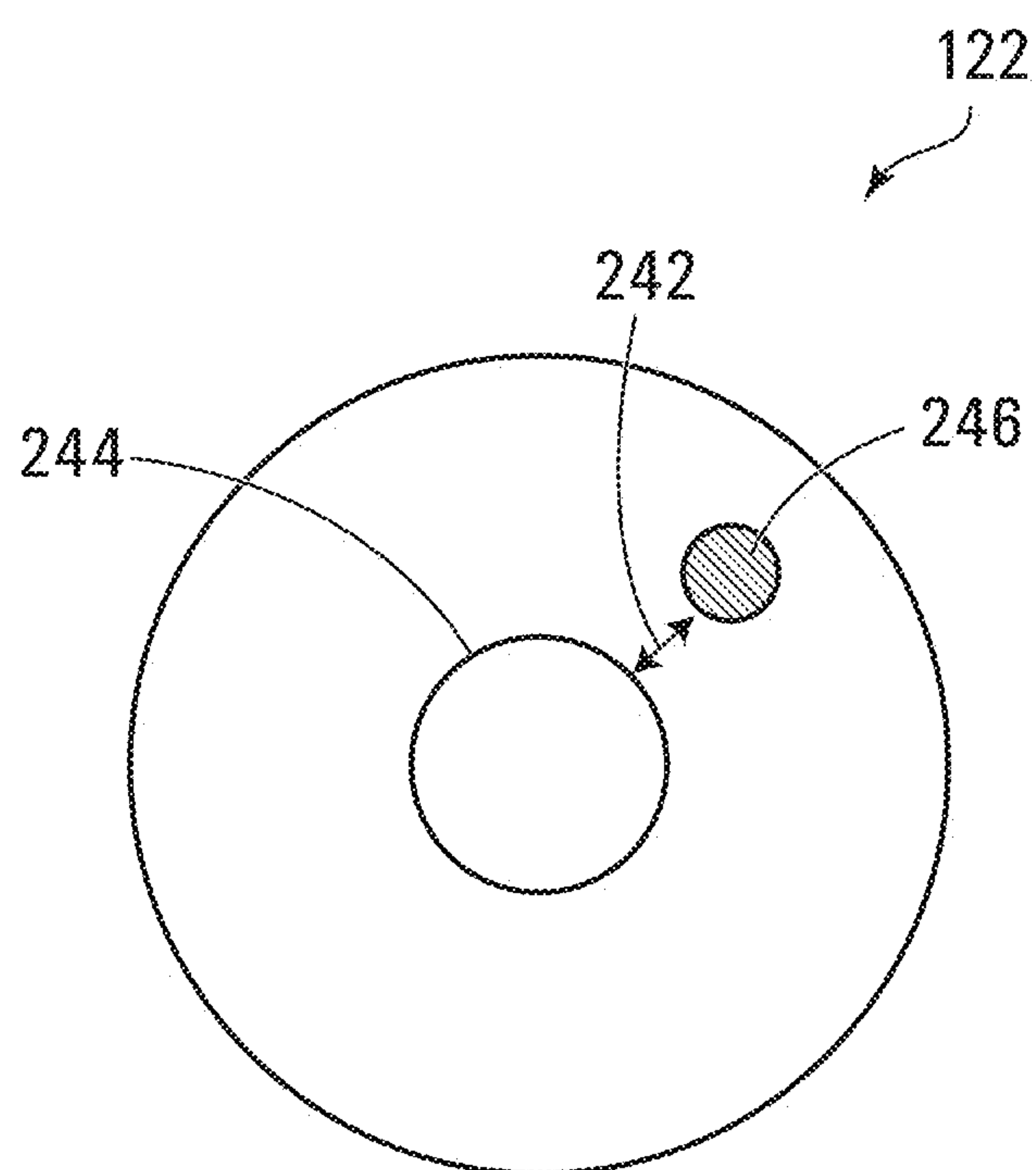


FIG. 11

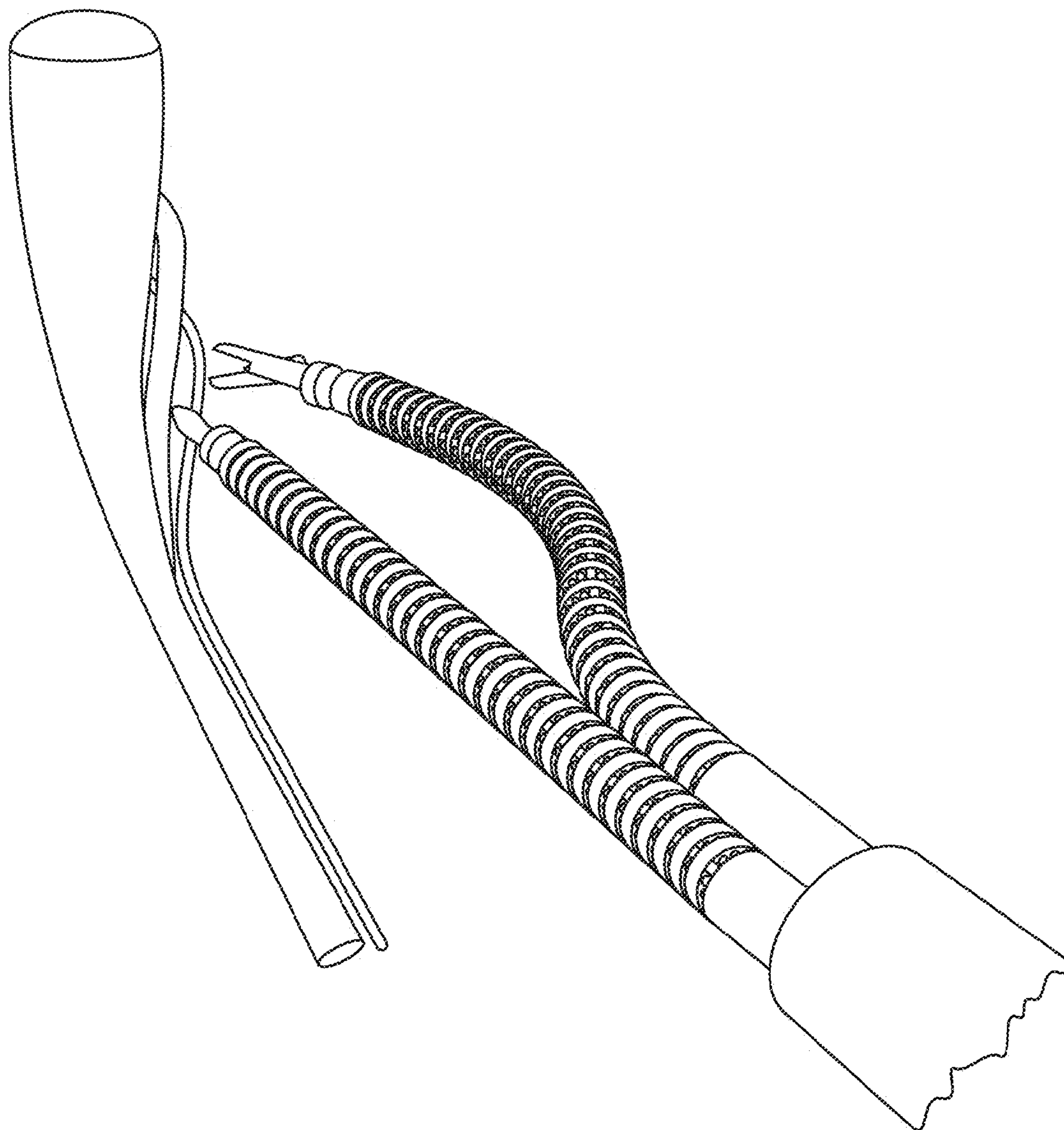


FIG. 12

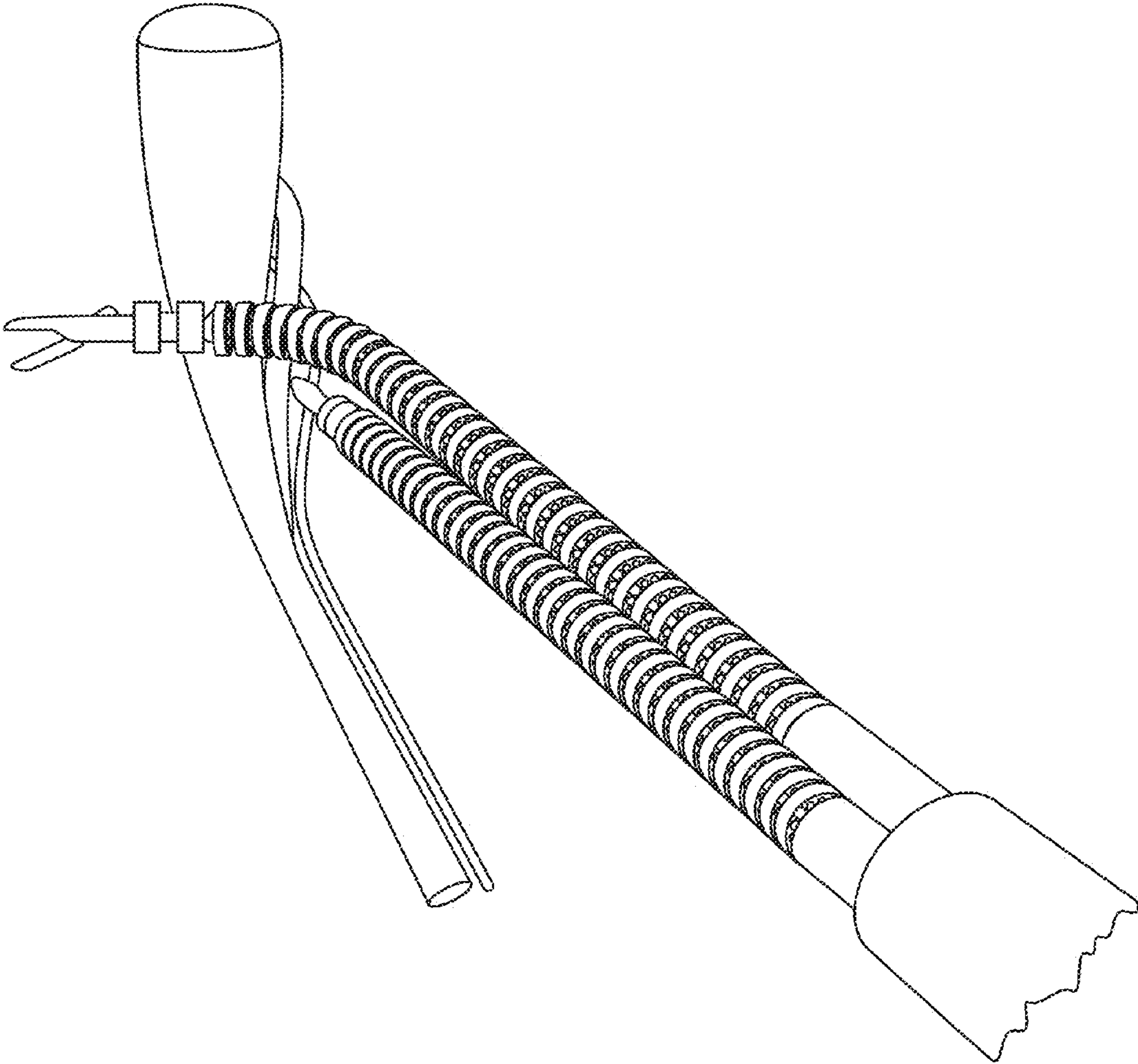


FIG. 13

INSTRUMENT COLLISION DETECTION AND FEEDBACK

BACKGROUND

1. Field

[0001] This disclosure relates to master-slave robotic systems such as those used for laparoscopic surgery and more particularly to prevention of collision of surgical tools and/or robotic manipulators during surgery.

2. Description of Related Art

[0002] When a plurality of dexterous tools are deployed in close proximity, instances can arise when instruments physically contact one another. There may be portions of the dexterous tools that are not intended to contact each other. Contact of the tools at points on a dexterous section thereof can cause unintended or unexpected motion of end effectors coupled to the dexterous tools. For example, the tools may become caught on one another and may flick when freed, resulting in a sudden and/or unexpected movement of the tools.

SUMMARY

[0003] The disclosure describes a method of operating a robotic control system comprising a master apparatus in communication with a plurality of input devices having respective handles capable of translational and rotational movement and a slave system having a tool positioning device corresponding to each respective handle, each tool positioning device holding a respective tool having an end effector whose position and orientation is determined in response to a position and orientation of a corresponding handle. The method involves causing at least one processor circuit associated with the master apparatus to produce desired new end effector positions and desired new end effector orientations of respective end effectors, in response to current positions and current orientations of corresponding respective handles. The method further involves causing the at least one processor circuit to use the desired new end effector positions and orientations to determine distances from each point of a first plurality of points along a first tool positioning device to each point of a plurality of points along at least one other tool positioning device and causing the at least one processor circuit to determine whether any of the distances meets a proximity criterion. The method further involves causing the at least one processor circuit to notify an operator, of the handles associated with tool positioning devices associated with distance that meets the proximity criterion, to indicate that the proximity criterion has been met.

[0004] Causing the at least one processor circuit to notify the operator may involve causing the at least one processor circuit to signal the input devices associated with the handles associated with the tool positioning devices associated with the distance that meets the proximity criterion, to cause the handles associated with the tool positioning devices associated with the distance that meets the proximity criterion to present haptic feedback to the operator, the haptic feedback impeding movement of the handles in a direction that would shorten the distance that meets the proximity criterion.

[0005] Causing the at least one processor circuit to notify the operator may involve causing the at least one processor

circuit to produce annunciation signals for causing an annunciator to annunciate that the proximity criterion has been met.

[0006] Causing the at least one processor circuit to produce annunciation signals may involve causing the at least one processor circuit to produce display control signals for causing a display to depict a visual representation indicative of the distance that meets the proximity criterion.

[0007] Causing the at least one processor circuit to produce annunciation signals may involve causing the at least one processor circuit to produce audio control signals for causing an audio device to provide an audible sound indicative of the distance that meets the proximity criterion.

[0008] The method may further involve causing the at least one processor circuit to disable movement of all tool positioning devices associated with the distance that meets the proximity criterion.

[0009] Causing the at least one processor circuit to disable movement of all positioning devices associated with the distance that meets the proximity criterion may involve causing the at least one processor circuit to transmit control signals to respective slave systems associated with the positioning devices associated with the distance, each control signal identifying a current end effector position and orientation based on a current position and orientation of the corresponding handle when the proximity criterion is not met, and causing the at least one processor circuit to cause the control signals transmitted to the slave systems associated with the tool positioning devices associated with the distance that meets the proximity criterion to identify a previous position and orientation of respective associated end effectors when the proximity criterion is met.

[0010] The method may involve causing the at least one processor circuit to enable movement of the tool positioning devices associated with the distance that met the proximity criterion when the proximity criterion is no longer met.

[0011] Producing the desired new end effector position and desired new end effector orientation may include causing the at least one processor circuit to receive from each input device current handle position signals (\vec{F}_{MCURR}) and current handle orientation signals (R_{MCURR}) representing a current position and a current orientation respectively of the handle of the corresponding input device, and causing the at least one processor circuit to produce, for corresponding tool positioning devices, new end effector position signals (\vec{F}_{EENEW}) and new end effector orientation signals (R_{EENEW}) defining the desired new end effector position and the desired new end effector orientation, respectively of the end effector, in response to corresponding the current handle position signals (\vec{F}_{MCURR}) and the current handle orientation signals (R_{MCURR}).

[0012] Causing the at least one processor circuit to receive the current handle position signals and the current handle orientation signals may involve causing the at least one processor circuit to periodically receive the current handle position signals and the current handle orientation signals.

[0013] The method may involve causing the at least one processor circuit to receive an enablement signal controlled by the operator, and causing the at least one processor circuit to detect a change in state of the enablement signal and when the change is detected store the current handle position signals (\vec{F}_{MCURR}) and the current handle orientation signals (R_{MCURR}) as master base position signals (\vec{F}_{MBAS}) and master base orientation signals (R_{MBASE}) respectively, and

store the new end effector position signals (\bar{F}_{EENEW}) and the new end effector orientation signals (R_{EENEW}) as end effector base position signals (\bar{F}_{EEBASE}) and end effector base orientation signals (R_{EEBASE}) respectively.

[0014] Causing the master apparatus to produce the new end effector position signals (\bar{F}_{EENEW}) and the new end effector orientation signals (R_{EENEW}) may involve the master apparatus to compute the new end effector position signals and the new end effector orientation signals according to the following relations:

$$\bar{F}_{EENEW} = A(\bar{F}_{MCURR} - \bar{F}_{MBAS}) + \bar{F}_{EEBASE}; \text{ and}$$

$$R_{EENEW} = R_{EEBASE} R_{MBASE}^{-1} R_{MCURR}$$

[0015] Each of the tool positioning devices may involve a plurality of segments each comprised of a plurality of vertebrae and at least some of the points in each of the plurality of points may be points on a respective segment or a vertebrae of a segment.

[0016] The method may involve, for each tool positioning device, causing the at least one processor circuit to compute vectors from a reference point associated with the tool positioning device to a point on a segment of the tool positioning device, based on the desired new end effector position and orientation calculated for the end effector associated with the tool positioning device.

[0017] The method may involve causing the at least one processor circuit to compute a position of at least one vertebrae associated with the segment, based on the position of the point on the segment.

[0018] The disclosure further describes a non-transitory computer readable medium encoded with codes for directing a processor circuit to execute any of the methods described above.

[0019] The disclosure further describes an apparatus for use in a robotic control system, the apparatus in communication with a plurality of input devices having respective handles capable of translational and rotational movement and the robotic control system comprising a slave system having a tool positioning device corresponding to each respective handle, each tool positioning device holding a respective tool having an end effector whose position and orientation is determined in response to a position and orientation of a corresponding handle. The apparatus includes means for producing desired new end effector positions and desired new end effector orientations of respective end effectors, in response to current positions and current orientations of corresponding respective handles, and means for determining distances from each point of a first plurality of points along a first tool positioning device, to each point of a plurality of points along at least one other tool positioning device based on the desired new end effector positions and orientations. The apparatus further includes means for determining whether any of the distances meets a proximity criterion and means for notifying an operator, of the handles associated with tool positioning devices associated with the distance that meets the proximity criterion to indicate that the proximity criterion has been met.

[0020] The means for notifying the operator may include means for signaling the input devices associated with the handles associated with the tool positioning devices associated with the distance that meets the proximity criterion, to cause the handles associated with the tool positioning devices associated with the distance that meets the proximity criterion to present haptic feedback to the operator, the

haptic feedback impeding movement of the handles in a direction that would shorten the distance that meets the proximity criterion.

[0021] The means for notifying the operator may include means for producing annunciation signals for causing an annunciator to annunciate that the proximity criterion has been met.

[0022] The means for producing annunciation signals may include causing the at least one processor circuit to produce display control signals for causing a display to depict a visual representation indicative of the distance that meets the proximity criterion.

[0023] The means for producing the annunciation signals may include means for producing audio control signals for causing an audio device to provide an audible sound indicative of the distance that meets the proximity criterion.

[0024] The apparatus may further include means for disabling movement of all tool positioning devices associated with the distance that meets the proximity criterion.

[0025] The means for disabling movement of all positioning devices associated with any distance that meets the proximity criterion may include means for transmitting control signals to respective slave systems associated with the positioning devices associated with the distance, each control signal identifying a current end effector position and orientation based on a current position and orientation of the corresponding handle when the proximity criterion is not met, and means for causing the control signals transmitted to the slave systems associated with the tool positioning devices associated with the distance that meets the proximity criterion to identify a previous position and orientation of respective associated end effectors when the proximity criterion is met.

[0026] The apparatus may include means for enabling movement of the tool positioning devices associated with the distance that met the proximity criterion when the proximity criterion is no longer met.

[0027] The means for producing the desired new end effector position and desired new end effector orientation may include means for receiving from each input device current handle position signals (\bar{F}_{MCURR}) and current handle orientation signals (R_{MCURR}) representing a current position and a current orientation respectively of the handle of the corresponding input device, and means for producing, for corresponding tool positioning devices, new end effector position signals (\bar{F}_{EENEW}) and new end effector orientation signals (R_{EENEW}) defining the desired new end effector position and the desired new end effector orientation, respectively of the end effector, in response to the corresponding current handle position signals (\bar{F}_{MCURR}) and the current handle orientation signals (R_{MCURR}).

[0028] The means for receiving the current handle position signals and the current handle orientation signals may include means for periodically receiving the current handle position signals and the current handle orientation signals.

[0029] The apparatus may include means for receiving an enablement signal controlled by the operator, means for detecting a change in state of the enablement signal, and means for storing the current handle position signals (\bar{F}_{MCURR}) and the current handle orientation signals (R_{MCURR}) as master base position signals (\bar{F}_{MBAS}) and master base orientation signals (R_{MBASE}) respectively, when the change is detected. The apparatus may further include means for storing the new end effector position signals (\bar{F}_{EENEW})

and the new end effector orientation signals (R_{EENEW}) as end effector base position signals (\bar{F}_{EEBASE}) and end effector base orientation signals (R_{EEBASE}) respectively, when the change is detected.

[0030] The means for computing the new end effector position signals (\bar{F}_{EENEW}) and the new end effector orientation signals (R_{EENEW}) may include means for computing the new end effector position signals and the new end effector orientation signals according to the following relations:

$$\bar{F}_{EENEW} = A(\bar{F}_{MCURR} - \bar{F}_{MBAS}) + \bar{F}_{EEBASE}; \text{ and}$$

$$R_{EENEW} = R_{EEBASE} R_{MBASE}^{-1} R_{MCURR}$$

[0031] Each of the tool positioning devices may include a plurality of segments each comprised of a plurality of vertebrae and at least some of the points in each the plurality of points may be points on a respective segment or a vertebrae of a segment.

[0032] The apparatus may include means for computing vectors to points along each tool positioning device from a reference point associated with the tool positioning device to a point on a segment of the tool positioning device, based on the desired new end effector position and orientation calculated for the end effector associated with the tool positioning device.

[0033] The apparatus may include means for computing a position of at least one vertebra associated with the segment, based on the position of the point on the segment.

[0034] The disclosure further describes an apparatus for use in a robotic control system, the apparatus in communication with a plurality of input devices having respective handles capable of translational and rotational movement and a slave system having a tool positioning device corresponding to each respective handle, each tool positioning device holding a respective tool having an end effector whose position and orientation is determined in response to a position and orientation of a corresponding handle. The apparatus includes at least one processor circuit configured to produce desired new end effector positions and desired new end effector orientations of respective end effectors, in response to current positions and current orientations of corresponding respective handles, and the at least one processor circuit is configured to use the desired new end effector positions and orientations to determine distances from each point of a first plurality of points along a first tool positioning device to each point of a plurality of points along at least one other tool positioning device. The apparatus further includes at least one processor circuit configured to determine whether any of the distances meets a proximity criterion, and to notify an operator, of the handles associated with tool positioning devices associated with the distance that meets the proximity criterion, to indicate that the proximity criterion has been met.

[0035] The at least one processor circuit may be configured to notify the operator by signaling the input devices associated with the handles associated with the tool positioning devices associated with the distance that meets the proximity criterion, to cause the handles associated with the tool positioning devices associated with the distance that meets the proximity criterion to present haptic feedback to the operator, the haptic feedback impeding movement of the handles in a direction that would shorten the distance that meets the proximity criterion.

[0036] The at least one processor circuit may be configured to notify the operator by producing annunciation signals for causing an annunciator to annunciate that the proximity criterion has been met.

[0037] The annunciation signals may include display control signals for causing a display to depict a visual representation indicative of the distance that meets the proximity criterion.

[0038] The annunciation signal may include audio control signals for causing an audio device to provide an audible sound indicative of the distance that meets the proximity criterion.

[0039] The at least one processor circuit may further be configured to disable movement of all tool positioning devices associated with the distance that meets the proximity criterion.

[0040] The at least one processor circuit may be configured to disable movement of all positioning devices associated with the distance that meets the proximity criterion by transmitting control signals to respective slave systems associated with the positioning devices associated with the distance, each control signal identifying a current end effector position and orientation based on a current position and orientation of the corresponding handle when the proximity criterion is not met, and causing the control signals transmitted to the slave systems associated with the tool positioning devices associated with the distance that meets the proximity criterion to identify a previous position and orientation of respective associated end effectors when the proximity criterion is met.

[0041] The at least one processor circuit may be further configured to enable movement of the tool positioning devices associated with the distance that met the proximity criterion when the proximity criterion is no longer met.

[0042] The at least one processor circuit may be configured to produce the desired new end effector position and desired new end effector orientation by receiving from each input device current handle position signals (\bar{F}_{MCURR}) and current handle orientation signals (R_{MCURR}) representing a current position and a current orientation respectively of the handle of the corresponding input device, and producing, for corresponding tool positioning devices, new end effector position signals (\bar{F}_{EENEW}) and new end effector orientation signals (R_{EENEW}) defining the desired new end effector position and the desired new end effector orientation, respectively of the end effector, in response to corresponding current handle position signals (\bar{F}_{MCURR}) and current handle orientation signals (R_{MCURR}).

[0043] The at least one processor circuit may be configured to receive the current handle position signals and the current handle orientation signals on a periodic basis.

[0044] The at least one processor circuit may be configured to receive an enablement signal controlled by the operator and to detect a change in state of the enablement signal and when the change is detected, to store the current handle position signals (\bar{F}_{MCURR}) and the current handle orientation signals (R_{MCURR}) as master base position signals (\bar{F}_{MBAS}) and master base orientation signals (R_{MBASE}) respectively, and store the new end effector position signals (\bar{F}_{EENEW}) and the new end effector orientation signals (R_{EENEW}) as end effector base position signals (\bar{F}_{EEBASE}) and end effector base orientation signals (R_{EEBASE}) respectively.

[0045] The at least one processor circuit may be configured to compute the new end effector position signals (\vec{F}_{EENEW}) and the new end effector orientation signals (R_{EENEW}) according to the following relations:

$$\vec{F}_{EENEW} = A(\vec{F}_{MCURR} - \vec{F}_{MBAS}) + \vec{F}_{EEBASE}; \text{ and}$$

$$R_{EENEW} = R_{EEBASE} R_{MBASE}^{-1} R_{MCURR}$$

[0046] Each of the tool positioning devices may include a plurality of segments each comprised of a plurality of vertebrae and at least some of the points in each the plurality of points may be points on a respective segment or a vertebrae of a segment.

[0047] The at least one processor circuit may be configured to, for each tool positioning device, compute vectors from a reference point associated with the tool positioning device to a point on a segment of the tool positioning device, based on the desired end effector position calculated for the end effector associated with the tool positioning device.

[0048] The at least one processor circuit may be configured to compute a position of at least one vertebrae associated with the segment, based on the position of the point on the segment.

[0049] Other aspects and features of the present disclosure will become apparent to those ordinarily skilled in the art upon review of the following description of specific embodiments in conjunction with the accompanying figures.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0050] In drawings which illustrate various embodiments described herein,

[0051] FIG. 1 is a pictorial representation of a laparoscopic surgery system according to one embodiment of the invention;

[0052] FIG. 2 is an oblique view of an input device of a master subsystem of the laparoscopic surgery system shown in FIG. 1;

[0053] FIG. 3 is a schematic representation of current and previous value buffers maintained by a master apparatus of the system shown in FIG. 1 and updated according to the functions shown in FIG. 8;

[0054] FIG. 4 is an oblique view of the input device shown in FIG. 2 and the tool positioning device of the slave subsystem shown in FIG. 1 showing relationships between base axes of the input device and the end effector;

[0055] FIG. 5 is an oblique view of a tool positioning device shown in FIG. 4 with a tool in the form of an end effector held thereby, in an insertion tube of the system shown in FIG. 1;

[0056] FIG. 6 is a flow chart illustrating certain functionality and certain signals produced and used by the system shown in FIG. 1;

[0057] FIG. 7 is a flow chart of a storage routine executed by the master apparatus in response to detection of a signal transition of an enablement signal produced in response to user input;

[0058] FIG. 8 is a flow chart of an end effector position and orientation calculation block of the flow chart shown in FIG. 6;

[0059] FIG. 9 is a perspective view of left and right hand tool positioning devices of the slave subsystem shown in FIG. 1;

[0060] FIG. 10 is a flowchart representing codes executed by a master apparatus of the master subsystem shown in FIG. 1, to provide for computation of proximity laparoscopic surgical tools;

[0061] FIG. 11 is a schematic diagram of a visual representation of proximity of the left and right handed tool positioning devices;

[0062] FIG. 12 is a perspective view of left and right hand tool positioning devices of the slave subsystem shown in FIG. 1 where the proximity criterion is not met; and

[0063] FIG. 13 is a perspective view of left and right hand tool positioning devices of the slave subsystem shown in FIG. 1 where the proximity criterion is met.

DETAILED DESCRIPTION

[0064] Referring to FIG. 1, a robotic control system in the form of a laparoscopic surgery system is shown generally at 50. The system 50 includes a master subsystem 52 and a slave subsystem 54. The master subsystem 52 may be located anywhere in the world, but for the purposes of this description it will be considered to be in an operating room. The slave subsystem 54 is located in the operating room.

[0065] In the embodiment shown, the master subsystem 52 comprises a workstation 56, which in this embodiment has first and second input devices 58 and 60 and a viewer 62 in communication with a master apparatus 64 comprising at least one processor circuit. In other embodiments there may be more input devices. The first and second input devices 58 and 60 each include respective handles 105 and 102. In this embodiment the first and second input devices 58 and 60 are operable to be actuated by respective hands of an operator such as a surgeon, for example, who will perform the laparoscopic surgery by manipulating the first and second input devices of the master subsystem 52 to control corresponding tools 66 and 67 on the slave subsystem 54.

[0066] The viewer 62 may include an LCD display 68, for example, for displaying images acquired by a camera 70 on the slave subsystem 54, to enable the operator to see the tools 66 and 67 inside the patient while manipulating the first and second input devices 58 and 60 to cause the tools to move in desired ways to perform the surgery. The first and second input devices 58 and 60 produce position and orientation signals that are received by the master apparatus 64 and the master apparatus produces slave control signals that are transmitted by wires 72 or wirelessly, for example, from the master subsystem 52 to the slave subsystem 54.

[0067] The slave subsystem 54 includes a slave computer 74 that receives the slave control signals from the master subsystem 52 and produces motor control signals that control motors 76 on a drive mechanism of a tool controller 78 of the slave subsystem, to extend and retract control wires (not shown) of respective tool positioning devices 79 and 81 to position and to rotate the tools 66 and 67. Exemplary tool positioning devices and tools for this purpose are described in PCT/CA2013/001076, which is incorporated herein by reference. Generally, there will be a tool and tool positioning device associated with each of the input devices 58 and 60. In the embodiment shown the tool positioning devices 79 and 81 extend through an insertion tube 61, a portion of which is inserted through a small incision 63 in the patient, to position end effectors 71 and 73 of the tools 66 and 67 inside the patient, to facilitate the surgery.

[0068] In the embodiment shown, the workstation 56 has a support 80 having a flat surface 82 for supporting the first

and second input devices **58** and **60** in positions that are comfortable to the user whose hands are actuating the first and second input devices **58** and **60**.

[0069] In the embodiment shown, the slave subsystem **54** includes a cart **84** in which the slave computer **74** is located. The cart **84** has an articulated arm **86** mechanically connected thereto, with a tool holder mount **88** disposed at a distal end of the articulated arm.

Input Devices

[0070] In the embodiment shown, the first and second input devices **58** and **60** are the same, but individually adapted for left and right hand use respectively. In this embodiment, each input device **58** and **60** is an Omega.7 haptic device available from Force Dimension, of Switzerland. For simplicity, only input device **60** will be further described, it being understood that input device **58** operates in the same way.

[0071] Referring to FIG. 2, the input device **60** includes the flat surface **82** supports a control unit **92** having arms **94**, **96**, **98** connected to the handle **102**, which is gimbal-mounted and can be grasped by the hand of an operator and positioned and rotated about orthogonal axes x_6 , y_6 and z_6 of a Cartesian reference frame having an origin at a point midway along the axis of a cylinder that forms part of the handle **102**. This Cartesian reference frame may be referred to as the handle reference frame and has an origin **104** (i.e. the center of the handle **102**) that may be referred to as the handle position.

[0072] The arms **94**, **96**, **98** facilitate translational movement of the handle **102** and hence the handle position **104**, in space, and confine the movement of the handle position within a volume in space. This volume may be referred to as the handle translational workspace. The control unit **92** is also able to generate a haptic force for providing haptic feedback to the handles **102** and **105** through the arms **94**, **96**, and **98**.

[0073] The handle **102** is mounted on a gimbal mount **106** having a pin **108**. The flat surface **82** has a calibration opening **110** for receiving the pin **108**. When the pin **108** is received in the opening **110**, the input device **60** is in a calibration position that is defined relative to a fixed master Cartesian reference frame comprising orthogonal axes x_r , y_r , z_r , generally in the center of the handle translational workspace. In the embodiment shown, this master reference frame has an x_r - z_r plane parallel to the flat surface **82** and a y_r axis perpendicular to the flat surface. In the embodiment shown, the z_r axis is parallel to the flat surface **82** and is coincident with an axis **112** passing centrally through the control unit **92** so that pushing and pulling the handle **102** toward and away from the center of the control unit **92** along the axis **112** in a direction parallel to the flat surface **82** is a movement in the z_r direction.

[0074] The control unit **92** has sensors (not shown) that sense the positions of the arms **94**, **96**, **98** and the rotation of the handle **102** about each of the x_6 , y_6 and z_6 axes and produces signals representing the handle position **104** in the workspace and the rotational orientation of the handle **102** relative to the fixed master reference frame x_r , y_r , z_r . In this embodiment, these position and orientation signals are transmitted on wires **111** of a USB bus to the master apparatus **64**. More particularly, the control unit **92** produces current handle position signals and current handle orientation signals that represent the current position and orientation of the

handle **102** by a current handle position vector \vec{F}_{MCURR} and a current handle rotation matrix R_{MCURR} , relative to the fixed master reference frame x_r , y_r , z_r .

[0075] For example, the current handle position vector \vec{F}_{MCURR} is a vector

$$\begin{pmatrix} x_6 \\ y_6 \\ z_6 \end{pmatrix},$$

where x_6 , y_6 , and z_6 represent coordinates of the handle position **104** within the handle translational workspace relative to the fixed master reference frame, x_r , y_r , z_r .

[0076] The current handle rotation matrix R_{MCURR} is a 3x3 matrix

$$\begin{bmatrix} x_{6x} & y_{6x} & z_{6x} \\ x_{6y} & y_{6y} & z_{6y} \\ x_{6z} & y_{6z} & z_{6z} \end{bmatrix},$$

where the columns of the matrix represent the axes of the handle reference frame x_6 , y_6 , z_6 relative to the fixed master reference frame x_r , y_r , z_r . R_{MCURR} thus defines the current rotational orientation of the handle **102** in the handle translational workspace, relative to the x_r , y_r , z_r fixed master reference frame.

[0077] The current handle position vector \vec{F}_{MCURR} and current handle rotation matrix R_{MCURR} are transmitted in the current handle position and current handle orientation signals on wires **111** of the USB bus, for example, to the master apparatus **64** in FIG. 1. Referring to FIG. 3, the master apparatus **64** includes a current memory buffer **140** that stores the current handle position vector \vec{F}_{MCURR} in a first store **142** of the current buffer and stores the current handle rotation matrix R_{MCURR} in a second store **144** of the current buffer **140**.

Tool Positioner and End Effector

[0078] The end effector **73** and tool positioning device **81** are further described with reference to FIG. 4 and FIG. 5. Referring to FIGS. 4 and 5 the tool positioning device **81** moves the tool **67** and its end effector **73** within a volume in space. This volume may be referred to as the end effector workspace.

[0079] The position and orientation of the end effector **73** is defined relative to a fixed slave reference frame having axes x_v , y_v and z_v which intersect at a point referred to as the fixed slave reference position **128**, lying on a longitudinal axis **136** of the insertion tube **61** and contained in a plane perpendicular to the longitudinal axis **136** and containing a distal edge **103** of the insertion tube **61**. The z_v axis is coincident with the longitudinal axis **136** of the insertion tube **61**. The x_v - z_v plane thus contains the longitudinal axis **136** of the insertion tube **61** and the x_v and y_v axes define a plane perpendicular to the longitudinal axis **136** of the insertion tube **61**.

[0080] In the embodiment shown, the end effector **73** includes a pair of gripper jaws, which may be positioned and oriented within the end effector workspace. A tip of the gripper jaws may be designated as an end effector position

and may be defined as the origin **150** of an end effector Cartesian reference frame x_5, y_5, z_5 . The end effector position **150** is defined relative to the slave reference position **128** and may be positioned and orientated relative to the fixed slave reference frame x_v, y_v, z_v .

[0081] A flow chart illustrating functions and signals produced and used by the system **50** is shown in FIG. **6**. Desired new end effector positions and desired new end effector orientations are calculated as described in connection with FIG. **6**, in response to the current handle position signals \vec{F}_{MCURR} and current handle orientation signals R_{MCURR} and are represented by a new end effector position vector \vec{F}_{EENEW} and a new rotation matrix R_{EENEW} . For example, the new end effector position vector \vec{F}_{EENEW} is a vector:

$$\begin{Bmatrix} x_5 \\ y_5 \\ z_5 \end{Bmatrix},$$

[0082] where x_5, y_5 , and z_5 represent coordinates of the end effector position **150** within the end effector workspace relative to the x_v, y_v, z_v , fixed slave reference frame. The end effector rotation matrix R_{EENEW} is a 3×3 matrix:

$$\begin{bmatrix} x_{5x} & y_{5x} & z_{5x} \\ x_{5y} & y_{5y} & z_{5y} \\ x_{5z} & y_{5z} & z_{5z} \end{bmatrix},$$

[0083] where the columns of the R_{EENEW} matrix represent the axes of the end effector reference frame x_5, y_5, z_5 written in the fixed slave reference frame x_v, y_v, z_v . R_{EENEW} thus defines a new orientation of the end effector **73** in the end effector workspace, relative to the x_v, y_v, z_v fixed slave reference frame.

Footswitch

[0084] Referring back to FIG. **1**, in addition to receiving signals from the input devices **58** and **60**, in the embodiment shown, the master apparatus **64** is coupled to a footswitch **170** actuable by the operator (surgeon) to provide a binary enablement signal to the master apparatus **64**. When the footswitch **170** is not activated, i.e. not depressed, the enablement signal is in an active state and when the footswitch **170** is depressed the enablement signal is in an inactive state. The footswitch **170** thus controls the state of the enablement signal. The enablement signal allows the operator to cause the master apparatus **64** to selectively enable and disable movement of the end effectors **71** and **73** in response to movement of the handles **105** and **102**.

Master Apparatus and Slave Computer

[0085] Still referring to FIG. **1**, in the embodiment shown, the master apparatus **64** is controlled by program codes stored on a non-transitory computer readable medium such as a disk drive **114**. The codes direct the master apparatus **64** to perform various functions including collision detection functions. Referring to FIG. **6**, these functions may be grouped into categories and expressed as functional blocks of code including a base setting block **216**, an end effector position and orientation calculation block **116**, a kinematics

block **118**, a motion control block **120**, and a feedback force control block **122**, each block including codes stored on the disk drive **114** of the master apparatus **64**.

[0086] For ease of description, the above blocks are shown as functional blocks within the master apparatus **64** in FIG. **6**. These functional blocks are executed separately but in the same manner for each input device of master subsystem **52**. In the embodiment shown, there are only two input devices, **58** and **60**. While the execution of these functional blocks for the input device **60**, tool positioning device **81** and end effector **73** are described, it should be understood that the codes are separately executed in the same way for all other input devices, such as the input device **58**, tool positioning device **79** and end effector **71** shown in FIG. **1** to achieve control of both end effectors **73** and **71** by the respective right and left hands of the operator.

[0087] The base setting block **216** is executed asynchronously, whenever the enablement signal produced by the footswitch **170** transitions from an inactive state to an active state, such as when the operator releases the footswitch in this embodiment. The base setting block **216** includes codes that direct the master apparatus **64** to set new base positions and orientations for positions and orientations of the handle **102** and end effector **73**, respectively as will be described below.

[0088] Generally, the end effector position and orientation calculation block **116** includes codes that direct the master apparatus **64** to calculate new end effector position and new orientation signals, \vec{F}_{EENEW} and R_{EENEW} , which position and orient the end effector **73** in the desired position and orientation \vec{F}_{MCURR} and R_{MCURR} in response to the position and orientation of the handle **102**. The end effector position and orientation calculation block **116** receives the enablement signal from the footswitch **170** and produces output signals including a “new” signal and a signal that is coupled to the feedback force control block **122**.

[0089] The kinematics block **118** includes codes that direct the master apparatus **64** to produce configuration variables in response to the newly calculated end effector position and orientation signals, \vec{F}_{EENEW} and R_{EENEW} . The configuration variables define a tool positioning device pose required to position and orient the end effector **73** in the desired position and orientations.

[0090] The feedback force control block **122** includes codes that direct the master apparatus **64** to receive the configuration variables from the kinematics block **118** and to determine a theoretical location of various points along the tool positioning devices **81** and **79** in the end effector workspace, and to determine whether a distance between any two of these theoretical locations on respective tool positioning devices **81** and **79** is less than a threshold distance. When such distance is less than the threshold distance, the codes of the feedback force control block **122** direct the master apparatus **64** to cause feedback to notify the operator of the proximity.

[0091] The motion control block **120** includes codes that direct the master apparatus **64** to produce the slave control signals, in response to the configuration variables.

[0092] In the embodiment shown in FIG. **1**, the slave control signals represent wire length values indicating how much certain control wires of the tool positioning device **81** of the slave subsystem **54** must be extended or retracted to cause the end effector **73** of the tool **67** to assume a desired position and orientation defined by positioning and rotating

the input device 60. The slave control signals representing the control wire length values are transmitted to the slave computer 74, which has its own computer readable medium encoded with a communication interface block 124 which includes codes for directing the slave computer to receive the slave control signals from the master apparatus 64. The computer readable medium at the slave computer is also encoded with a motor control signal generator block 126 which includes codes for causing the slave computer 74 to generate motor control signals for controlling the motors 76 on the tool controller 78 to extend and retract the control wires controlling the attached tool positioning device 81 according to the control wire length values represented by the slave control signals from the master apparatus 64. The various blocks in FIG. 6 are described below in greater detail.

Base Setting Block

[0093] A flow chart showing details of operations included in the base setting block 216 is shown in FIG. 7. Referring to FIG. 7, as disclosed above, the base setting block 216 is executed asynchronously, whenever the enablement signal transitions from an inactive state to an active state. The base setting block 216 directs the master apparatus 64 to set new base positions and new base orientations for positions and orientations of the handle 102 and end effector 73, respectively. Referring back to FIG. 3, the master apparatus 64 stores values x_{mb} , y_{mb} , z_{mb} representing a definable master base position vector represented by a base position signal \vec{F}_{MBASE} in a third store 146 and stores values representing a definable master base rotation matrix represented by a base orientation signal R_{MBASE} in a fourth store 148.

[0094] On startup of the system 50 the master apparatus 64 initially causes the definable master base position vector \vec{F}_{MBASE} to be set equal to the current handle position vector \vec{F}_{MCURR} and causes the definable master base rotation matrix R_{MBASE} to define an orientation that is the same as the current orientation defined by the handle rotation matrix R_{MCURR} associated with the current handle rotation.

[0095] Initially, therefore:

[0096] $\vec{F}_{MBASE} = \vec{F}_{MCURR}$; and

[0097] $R_{MBASE} = R_{MCURR}$

[0098] In other words, a definable master base reference frame represented by the axes x_{mb} , y_{mb} and z_{mb} and the handle reference frame represented by the axes x_6 , y_6 and z_6 coincide at startup.

[0099] Thereafter, the master base position vector \vec{F}_{MBASE} and the master base rotation matrix R_{MBASE} are maintained at the same values as on startup until the enablement signal is activated, such as by the release of the footswitch (170 in FIG. 1), which causes the enablement signal to transition from the inactive state to the active state. In response to the inactive to active state transition of the enablement signal, the base setting block 216 in FIGS. 6 and 7 is executed to change the master base position vector \vec{F}_{MBASE} and master base rotation matrix R_{MBASE} values to the values of the currently acquired master position signal \vec{F}_{MCURR} and currently acquired master orientation signal R_{MCURR} respectively.

[0100] Referring back to FIG. 3, in addition to storing the current master position and orientation signals \vec{F}_{MCURR} and R_{MCURR} in first and second stores 142 and 144 respectively of the current buffer 140, the master apparatus 64 also stores the calculated values for the position signal \vec{F}_{EENEW} and

orientation signal R_{EENEW} of the end effector in the fifth and sixth stores 152 and 154 respectively of the current buffer 140. The base setting block 216 also directs the master apparatus 64 to further store values x_{sb} , y_{sb} , z_{sb} representing a definable end effector base position vector \vec{F}_{EEBASE} in a seventh store 162 and stores values representing a definable end effector base rotation matrix R_{EEBASE} in a eighth store 164 in the current buffer 140. The end effector base position is shown as a reference frame represented by the axes x_{sb} , y_{sb} , z_{sb} in FIG. 4. The input device 60 and the master base reference frame represented by the axes x_{mb} , y_{mb} and z_{mb} is also shown in FIG. 4. The master apparatus 64 initially causes the definable end effector base position vector \vec{F}_{EEBASE} to be set equal to the new end effector position vector \vec{F}_{EENEW} on startup of the system and causes the definable slave base rotation matrix R_{EEBASE} to define an orientation that is the same as the orientation defined by the new end effector rotation matrix R_{EENEW} on startup of the system. On initialization of the system when there are no previously stored values for \vec{F}_{EENEW} or R_{EENEW} , \vec{F}_{EEBASE} and R_{EEBASE} will be set equal to the \vec{F}_{EENEW} and R_{EENEW} defined based on a home configuration of the tool positioning device 81, tool 66 and end effector 73. In this embodiment, the home configuration defines configuration variables to produce a generally straight tool positioning device pose (as shown in FIG. 4) and is preconfigured before initialization of the system. In other embodiments, the home configuration can define configuration variables to produce different bent or both straight and bent tool positioning device poses. Initially, therefore:

[0101] $\vec{F}_{EEBASE} = \vec{F}_{EENEW}$; and

[0102] $R_{EEBASE} = R_{EENEW}$

[0103] In other words, a definable slave base reference frame represented by the axes x_{sb} , y_{sb} and z_{sb} and the end effector reference frame represented by the axes x_5 , y_5 and z_5 coincide at startup.

[0104] The end effector base position vector \vec{F}_{EEBASE} and end effector base rotation matrix R_{EEBASE} are maintained at the same values as on startup until the enablement signal is activated by the footswitch 170 (shown in FIG. 1), which causes the enablement signal to transition from the inactive state to the active state. In response, the base setting block 216 in FIGS. 6 and 7 changes the end effector base position vector \vec{F}_{EEBASE} and end effector rotation matrix R_{EEBASE} to the newly calculated end effector position vector \vec{F}_{EENEW} and newly calculated end effector orientation matrix R_{EENEW} .

End Effector Position and Orientation Calculation Block

[0105] Generally, the end effector position and orientation calculation block 116 includes codes that direct the master apparatus 64 to calculate new end effector position and orientation signals, referred to herein as \vec{F}_{EENEW} and R_{EENEW} , which position and orient the end effectors 73 into a desired position and orientation in response to the current handle position \vec{F}_{MCURR} and current handle orientation R_{MCURR} . In one embodiment the end effector position and orientation calculation block 116 is executed periodically at a rate of about 1 kHz. A flow chart showing details of operations included in the end effector position and orientation calculation block 116 is shown in FIG. 8. The operations begin with block 159 directing the master apparatus 64 to query the control unit 92 of the input device 60 for the current handle position vector \vec{F}_{MCURR} and current handle

rotation matrix R_{MCURR} . As previously described and referring to FIG. 3, \vec{F}_{MCURR} and R_{MCURR} values are stored by the master apparatus 64, the first store 142 storing the three values representing the current handle position vector \vec{F}_{MCURR} and the second store 144 storing the nine values representing the current handle rotation matrix R_{MCURR} .

[0106] After new values for \vec{F}_{MCURR} and R_{MCURR} are acquired from the control unit 92, block 160 directs the master apparatus 64 to calculate new end effector position signals \vec{F}_{EENEW} and new end effector orientation signals R_{EENEW} representing a desired end effector position 150 and desired end effector orientation, relative to the fixed slave reference position 128 and the slave base orientation. Block 160 also directs the master apparatus 64 to store, in the fifth store 152 in FIG. 3, values representing the new end effector position vector \vec{F}_{EENEW} and to store, in the sixth store 154 in FIG. 3, values representing the desired end effector orientation matrix R_{EENEW} .

[0107] The new end effector position signals \vec{F}_{EENEW} and new end effector orientation signals R_{EENEW} are calculated according to the following relations:

$$\vec{F}_{EENEW} = A(\vec{F}_{MCURR} - \vec{F}_{MBASE}) + \vec{F}_{EEBASE} \quad (1a)$$

and

$$R_{EENEW} = R_{EEBASE} R_{MBASE}^{-1} R_{MCURR} \quad (1b),$$

[0108] where: \vec{F}_{EENEW} is the new end effector position vector that represents the new desired position of the end effector 73 in the end effector workspace, and is defined relative to the slave base reference position;

[0109] A is a scalar value representing a scaling factor in translational motion between the master and the slave;

[0110] \vec{F}_{MCURR} is the current representation of the handle position vector stored in the first store 142, the handle position vector being defined relative to the fixed master reference frame;

[0111] \vec{F}_{MBASE} is the last-saved position vector \vec{F}_{MCURR} for handle 102 that was shifted upon the last inactive to active state transition of the enablement signal such as by release of the footswitch 170 or on system initialization or by operation of a control interface by an operator;

[0112] \vec{F}_{EEBASE} is the last saved position vector \vec{F}_{EENEW} for the end effector 73 that was shifted upon the last inactive to active state transition of the enablement signal or on system initialization;

[0113] R_{EENEW} is the new end effector orientation matrix representing the current orientation of the end effector 73, and is defined relative to the fixed slave reference position 128;

[0114] R_{EEBASE} is the last-saved rotation matrix R_{EENEW} of the end effector 73 shifted upon the last inactive to active state transition of the enablement signal;

[0115] R_{MBASE}^{-1} is the inverse of rotation matrix R_{MBASE} , where R_{MBASE} is the last-saved rotation matrix R_{MCURR} of the handle 102 saved upon the last inactive to active state transition of the enablement signal;

[0116] R_{MCURR} is the currently acquired rotation matrix representing the orientation of the handle 102 relative to the fixed master reference frame;

[0117] Block 161 then directs the master apparatus 64 to determine whether or not the enablement signal is in the

active state. If the enablement signal is in the active state, optional block 208 directs the master apparatus 64 to execute certain special functions, such as alignment control functions, for example. Such alignment control functions are described in applicant's co-pending applications U.S. 62/101,734 and U.S. 62/101,804, for example, hereby incorporated by reference in their entirety.

[0118] Where the special functions are alignment control functions, such functions may have one of two outcomes, for example. The first outcome may direct the master apparatus 64 to execute block 215 which causes the master apparatus 64 to send a "new" signal to the motion control block 120 to signal the motion control block 120 to send slave control signals to the slave computer 74 based on the newly calculated end effector position and newly calculated end effector orientation \vec{F}_{EENEW} and R_{EENEW} . The second outcome directs the master apparatus 64 to execute block 163, which causes the master apparatus 64 to set the "new" signal inactive to signal the motion control block 120 to send slave control signals based on a previously calculated end effector position and previously calculated end effector orientation \vec{F}_{EEPREV} and R_{EEPREV} .

[0119] If block 215 is executed, the slave control signals are based on the newly calculated values for \vec{F}_{EENEW} and R_{EENEW} . This causes the end effector 73 to assume a position and orientation determined by the current position and current orientation of the handle 102.

[0120] Block 159 then directs the master apparatus 64 to copy the current position vector \vec{F}_{MCURR} and the current rotation matrix R_{MCURR} stored in stores 142 and 144 into stores 143 and 145 of a "previous" buffer 141 referred to in FIG. 3 and to copy newly calculated end effector position vector \vec{F}_{EENEW} and newly calculated end effector rotation matrix R_{EENEW} into stores 147 and 149 of the previous buffer 141. The newly calculated end effector position vector \vec{F}_{EENEW} and newly calculated end effector rotation matrix R_{EENEW} are thus renamed as "previously calculated end effector position vector" \vec{F}_{EEPREV} and "previously calculated end effector rotation matrix" R_{EEPREV} . By storing the newly calculated end effector position vector \vec{F}_{EENEW} and newly calculated end effector rotation matrix R_{EENEW} , as previously calculated end effector position vector \vec{F}_{EEPREV} and previously calculated end effector rotation matrix R_{EEPREV} , a subsequently acquired new end effector position vector \vec{F}_{EENEW} and subsequently acquired new end effector rotation matrix R_{EENEW} can be calculated from the next current handle position vector \vec{F}_{MCURR} and next current handle rotation matrix R_{MCURR} .

[0121] If block 163 is executed, the slave control signals are based on \vec{F}_{EEPREV} and R_{EEPREV} . This causes the end effector 73 to assume a position and orientation determined by a previous position and previous orientation of the handle 102. The end effector position and orientation calculation block 116 is then ended.

[0122] Still referring to FIG. 8, at block 161, if the enablement signal is in the inactive state, and while it remains in the inactive state, the master apparatus 64 will immediately execute block 163 which directs the master apparatus 64 to set the "new" signal inactive to indicate to the motion control block 120 in FIG. 5 that it should send the slave control signals based on the previously calculated values of \vec{F}_{EEPREV} and R_{EEPREV} in stores 147 and 149, respectively. The slave control signals produced by the motion control block 120 thus represent control wire length

values derived from the last saved values of \vec{F}_{EENEW} and R_{EENEW} , causing the end effector **73** to remain stationary because the same slave control signals as were previously determined are sent to the slave computer **74**. The end effector position and orientation calculation block **116** is then ended. As long as the enablement signal is inactive, slave control signals are based only on the previously calculated end effector position and previously calculated orientation signals \vec{F}_{EEPREV} and R_{EEPREV} as they exist before the enablement signal became inactive.

[0123] Accordingly, when the enablement signal is in the inactive state, the handle **102** can be moved and rotated and the calculations of \vec{F}_{EENEW} and R_{EENEW} will still be performed by block **160** of the end effector position and orientation calculator block **116**, but there will be no movement of the end effector **73**, because the previous slave control signals are sent to the slave computer **74**. This allows “clutching” or repositioning the handle **102** without corresponding movement of the end effector **73** and enables the end effector **73** to have increased range of movement and allows the operator to reposition their hands to a comfortable position within the handle translational workspace.

[0124] While it has been shown that either the previously calculated end effector position and previously calculated orientation signals \vec{F}_{EENEW} and R_{EEPREV} or the newly calculated end effector position and newly calculated orientation \vec{F}_{EENEW} and R_{EENEW} are used as the basis for producing the slave control signals sent by the motion control block **120** to the slave computer **74**, the newly calculated end effector position and newly calculated end effector orientation signals \vec{F}_{EENEW} and R_{EENEW} are always presented to the kinematics block **118** and the feedback force control block **122**. In other words, the kinematic block **118** always calculates the configuration variables based on the newly calculated end effector position and newly calculated end effector orientation signals \vec{F}_{EENEW} and R_{EENEW} , and the feedback force control block **122** always calculates the theoretical locations of various points along the tool positioning device and the distance between the various points on the left tool positioning device and the various points on the right tool positioning device based on \vec{F}_{EENEW} and R_{EENEW} .

Kinematics Block

[0125] The kinematics block **118** includes codes that direct the master apparatus **64** to produce configuration variables in response to the newly calculated end effector position and orientation signals \vec{F}_{EENEW} and R_{EENEW} . The configuration variables define a tool positioning device pose required to position and orient the end effector **73** into the desired end effector position and orientation.

[0126] The kinematics block **118** receives newly calculated end effector position and orientation signals \vec{F}_{EENEW} and R_{EENEW} each time the end effector position and orientation calculation block **116** is executed. In response, the kinematics block **118** produces configuration variables for the tool positioning device **81**.

[0127] Referring to FIGS. **5** and **9**, the tool positioning device **81** has a first articulated segment **130**, referred to as an s-segment and a second articulated segment **132** referred to as a distal segment. The segments each include a plurality of “vertebra” **224**. The s-segment **130** begins at a distance from the insertion tube **61**, referred to as the insertion distance q_{ins} , which is the distance between the fixed slave reference position **128** defined as the origin of the slave fixed

base reference frame x_v, y_v, z_v and a first position **230** at the origin of a first position reference frame x_1, y_1, z_1 (shown in FIG. **9**). The insertion distance q_{ins} represents an unbendable portion of the tool positioning device **81** that extends out of the end of the insertion tube **61**. In the embodiment shown, the insertion distance q_{ins} may be about 10-20 mm, for example. In other embodiments, the insertion distance q_{ins} may be longer or shorter, varying from 0-100 mm, for example.

[0128] The s-segment **130** extends from the first position **230** to a third position **234** defined as an origin of a third reference frame having axes x_3, y_3, z_3 and is capable of assuming a smooth S-shape when control wires (not shown) inside the s-segment **130** are pushed and pulled. The s-segment **130** has a mid-point at a second position **232**, defined as the origin of a second position reference frame having axes x_2, y_2, z_2 . The s-segment **130** has a length L_1 , seen best on the left-hand side tool positioning device **79** in FIG. **9**. In the embodiment shown, this length L_1 may be about 65 mm, for example.

[0129] The distal segment **132** extends from the third position **234** to a fourth position **236** defined as an origin of a fourth reference frame having axes x_4, y_4, z_4 . The distal segment **132** has a length L_2 also seen best on the left-hand side tool positioning device **79** in FIG. **9**. In the embodiment shown, this length L_2 may be about 23 mm, for example.

[0130] Each tool **66** and **67** also has an end effector length, which in the embodiment shown is a gripper length L_3 that extends from the fourth position **236** to the end effector position **150** defined as the origin of axes x_5, y_5, z_5 . The gripper length L_3 is again best seen on the left-hand side tool positioning device **79** in FIG. **9** and in this embodiment may be about 25 mm, for example. The slave reference position **128**, first position **230**, second position **232**, third position **234**, fourth position **236** and end effector position **150** may collectively be referred to as tool reference positions.

[0131] As explained in PCT/CA2013/001076, hereby incorporated herein by reference in its entirety, by pushing and pulling on certain control wires inside the tool positioning devices **79** and **81**, the s-segment **130** can be bent into any of various degrees of an S-shape, from straight as shown in FIG. **9** on the left hand tool positioning device **81** to a partial S-shape as shown in FIG. **9** on the right hand tool positioning device **79** to a full S-shape. The s-segment **130** is sectional in that it has a first section **220** and a second section **222** on opposite sides of the second position **232**. Referring now to FIG. **5**, the first and second sections **220** and **222** lie in a first bend plane containing the first position **230**, second position **232**, and third position **234**. The first bend plane is at an angle δ_{prox} to the x_v-z_v plane of the fixed slave reference frame. The first section **220** and second section **222** are bent in the first bend plane through opposite but equal angles θ_{prox} such that no matter the angle θ_{prox} or the bend plane angle δ_{prox} , the z_3 axis of the third position **234** is always parallel to and aligned in the same direction as the z_v axis of the fixed slave reference position **128**. Thus, by pushing and pulling on the control wires within the tool positioning device **81**, the third position **234** can be placed at any of a number of discrete positions within a cylindrical volume in space. This volume may be referred to as the s-segment workspace.

[0132] In addition, the distal segment **132** lies in a second bend plane containing the third position **234** and the fourth position **236**. The second bend plane is at an angle δ_{dist} to the

x_v - z_v plane of the fixed slave reference frame. The distal segment **132** is bent in the second bend plane at an angle θ_{dist} . Thus, by pushing and pulling the control wires within the tool positioning device **81**, the fourth position **236** can be placed within another volume in space. This volume may be referred to as the distal workspace. The combination of the s-segment workspace plus the distal workspace can be referred to as the tool positioning device workspace, as this represents the total possible movement of the tools **66** and **67** as effected by the respective tool positioning devices **79** and **81**.

[0133] The distance between the fourth position **236** and the end effector position **150** is the distance between the movable portion of the distal segment **132** and the tip of the gripper end effector **73** (and **73**) in the embodiment shown, i.e. the length the gripper length L_3 . Generally, the portion of the gripper between the fourth position **236** and the end effector position **150** (L_3) will be unbendable.

[0134] In the embodiment shown, the end effector **71** or **73** is a gripper jaw tool that is rotatable about the z_5 axis in the x_5 - y_5 plane of the end effector reference frame, the angle of rotation being represented by an angle γ relative to the positive x_5 axis. Finally, the gripper jaws may be at any of varying degrees of openness from fully closed to fully open (as limited by the hinge). The varying degrees of openness may be defined as the “gripper”.

[0135] In summary therefore, the configuration variables provided by the kinematic block **118** codes are:

[0136] q_{ins} : represents a distance from the slave reference position **128** defined by axes x_v , y_v , and z_v to the first position **230** defined by axes x_1 , y_1 and z_1 where the s-segment **130** of the tool positioning device **81** begins;

[0137] δ_{prox} : represents a first bend plane in which the s-segment **130** is bent relative to the x_v - y_v plane of the fixed slave reference frame;

[0138] θ_{prox} : represents an angle at which the first and second sections **220** and **222** of the s-segment **130** is bent in the first bend plane;

[0139] δ_{dist} : represents a second bend plane in which the distal segment **132** is bent relative to the x_v - y_v plane of the fixed slave reference frame;

[0140] θ_{dist} : represents an angle through which the distal segment **132** is bent in the second bend;

[0141] γ : represents a rotation of the end effector **73** about axis z_5 ; and

[0142] Gripper: represents a degree of openness of the gripper jaws of the end effector **73**. (This is a value which is calculated in direct proportion to a signal produced by an actuator (not shown) on the handle **102** indicative of an amount of pressure the operator exerts by squeezing the handle).

[0143] To calculate the configuration variables, it will first be recalled that the end effector rotation matrix R_{EENEW} is a 3x3 matrix:

$$\begin{bmatrix} x_{5x} & y_{5x} & z_{5x} \\ x_{5y} & y_{5y} & z_{5y} \\ x_{5z} & y_{5z} & z_{5z} \end{bmatrix}.$$

[0144] Since the last column of R_{EENEW} is the z-axis of the end effector reference frame written relative to the fixed

slave reference frame y_v , y_v and z_v , the values θ_{dist} , δ_{dist} , and γ associated with the distal segment **132** can be calculated according to the relations:

$$\theta_{dist} = \frac{\pi}{2} - \text{atan2}\left(\sqrt{z_{5x}^2 + z_{5y}^2}, z_{5z}\right) \quad (2)$$

$$\delta_{dist} = -\text{atan2}(z_{5y}, z_{5x}) \quad (3)$$

$$\text{If } |\delta_2| > \frac{n}{2} |\delta_{dist}| > \frac{\pi}{2}$$

$$\gamma = \text{atan2}(-y_{5z}, x_{5z}) - \delta_{dist} + \pi \quad (4a)$$

else

$$\gamma = \text{atan2}(y_{5z}, -x_{5z}) - \delta_{dist} \quad (4b)$$

$$\gamma = \text{atan2}(R_{ee3,2} - R_{ee3,1}) - \delta_2$$

[0145] These values can then be used to compute the location of third position **234** ($\bar{p}_{3/v}$) relative to the fixed slave reference position **128** by computing the vectors from the third position **234** to the fourth position **236** ($\bar{p}_{4/3}$) and from the fourth position **236** to the end effector position **150** ($\bar{p}_{5/4}$) and subtracting those vectors from \bar{p}_{EENEW} .

$$\bar{p}_{3/s} = \bar{p}_{EENEW} - \bar{p}_{4/3} - \bar{p}_{5/4}, \quad (5)$$

where:

$$\bar{p}_{4/3} \cdot \bar{i} = \frac{-L_2 \cos \delta_{dist} (\sin \theta_{dist} - 1)}{\frac{\pi}{2} - \theta_{dist}} \quad \bar{p}_{4/3} \cdot \bar{i} = \frac{-L_2 \cos \delta_2 (\sin(\theta_2) - 1)}{\frac{\pi}{2} - \theta_2} \quad (6a)$$

$$\bar{p}_{4/3} \cdot \bar{j} = \frac{L_2 \sin \delta_{dist} (\sin \theta_{dist} - 1)}{\frac{\pi}{2} - \theta_{dist}} \quad (6b)$$

$$\bar{p}_{4/3} \cdot \bar{k} = \frac{L_2 \cos(\theta_{dist})}{\frac{\pi}{2} - \theta_{dist}} \quad (6c)$$

$$\bar{p}_{5/4} \cdot \bar{i} = L_3 \cos(\delta_{dist}) \cos(\theta_{dist}) \quad (7a)$$

$$\bar{p}_{5/4} \cdot \bar{j} = -L_3 \sin(\delta_{dist}) \cos(\theta_{dist}) \quad (7b)$$

$$\bar{p}_{5/4} \cdot \bar{k} = L_3 \sin(\theta_{dist}), \quad (7c)$$

[0146] and where:

[0147] \bar{i} is a unit vector in the x direction;

[0148] \bar{j} is a unit vector in the y direction; and

[0149] \bar{k} is a unit vector in the z direction.

[0150] Once the vector from the fixed slave reference position **128** to the third position **234** ($\bar{p}_{3/v}$) is known, the configuration variables, δ_{prox} and θ_{prox} , for the s-segment **130** can be found. δ_{prox} associated with the s-segment **130** is calculated by solving the following two equations for δ_{prox} :

$$\bar{p}_{3/v} \cdot \bar{i} = \frac{-L_1 \cos \delta_{prox} (\sin \theta_{prox} - 1)}{\frac{\pi}{2} - \theta_{prox}} \quad (8a)$$

$$\bar{p}_{3/v} \cdot \bar{j} = \frac{L_1 \sin \delta_{prox} (\sin \theta_{prox} - 1)}{\frac{\pi}{2} - \theta_{prox}} \quad (8b)$$

[0151] The ratio of (8b) and (8a) gives

$$\delta_{prox} = a \tan 2(-\bar{p}_{3/v} \cdot \bar{j}, \bar{p}_{3/v} \cdot \bar{i}), \quad (9)$$

[0152] where \bar{i} and \bar{j} are unit vectors in the x and y directions respectively.

[0153] A closed form solution cannot be found for θ_{prox} , thus θ_{prox} must be found with a numerical equation solution to either of equations (8a) or (8b). A Newton-Raphson method, being a method for iteratively approximating successively better roots of a real-valued function, may be employed, for example. The Newton-Raphson method can be implemented using the following equations:

$$f(\theta_{prox}) = \frac{L_1}{\frac{\pi}{2} - \theta_{prox}} \cos \delta_{prox} (1 - \sin \theta_{prox}) - \bar{p}_{3/v} \cdot \bar{i} = 0, \quad (10)$$

[0154] where

[0155] \bar{i} is the unit vector in the x direction; and

[0156] $\bar{p}_{3/v}$ is a vector from the fixed slave reference position 128 to the third position 234.

[0157] The equation (10) is equation (8a) rewritten in the form $f(\theta_{prox}) = 0$. The Newton-Raphson method tends to converge very quickly because in the range $0 < \theta_{prox} < \pi$, the function has a large radius of curvature and has no local stationary points. Following the Newton-Raphson method, successive improved estimates of θ_{prox} can be made iteratively to satisfy equation (10) using the following relationship:

$$\theta_{n+1} = \theta_n - \frac{f(\theta_n)}{f'(\theta_n)}, \quad (11)$$

[0158] Finally, upon determination of θ_{prox} , the following equation can be used to find q_{ins} ,

$$q_{ins} = -\bar{p}_{3/v} \cdot \bar{k} - \frac{L_1 \cos \theta_{prox}}{\frac{\pi}{2} - \theta_{prox}}, \quad (12)$$

[0159] where:

[0160] \bar{k} is the unit vector in the z direction;

[0161] $\bar{p}_{3/v}$ is a vector from the fixed slave reference position 128 to the third position 234; and

[0162] $\bar{p}_{3/v} \cdot \bar{k}$ is the dot product of the vector $\bar{p}_{3/v}$ and the unit vector \bar{k} .

[0163] The codes in the kinematics block 118 shown in FIG. 6 direct the master apparatus 64 to calculate values for the above configuration variables in response to the end effector position and orientation signals \bar{F}_{EENEW} and R_{EENEW} produced by the end effector position and orientation calculation block 116 and these calculated configuration variables generally define a tool positioning device pose required to position the end effector 71 or 73 at a desired location and at a desired orientation in the end effector workspace.

[0164] It will be appreciated that configuration variables are produced for each end effector 71 and 73 and therefore in the embodiment shown, two sets of configuration variables which will be referred to as left and right configuration

variables respectively are produced and forwarded or otherwise made available to the motion control block 120 and feedback force control block 122.

Feedback Force Control Block

[0165] Referring back to FIG. 6, the feedback force control block 122 directs the master apparatus 64 to receive the left and right configuration variables from the kinematics blocks 118 executed for both the left and right end effectors 71 and 73 respectively and to determine a theoretical location in the tool positioning device workspace of various points along each of the tool positioning devices 79 and 81. The feedback force control block 122 also directs the master apparatus 64 to determine whether a distance between any two theoretical locations located on separate tool positioning devices is less than a threshold distance. When such distance is less than the threshold distance, the codes of the feedback force control block 122 direct the master apparatus 64 to cause the operator to be notified of the proximity. Notifying the operator of this proximity may be provided by visual means through the LCD display 68 in the viewer 62 and/or by audio means and/or by providing haptic feedback using the input devices 58 and 60, for example.

[0166] A flow chart showing details of operations included in the feedback force control block 122 is shown in FIG. 10. Referring to FIG. 10, the feedback force control block 122 includes blocks 250 and 252 that respectively receive the left and right configuration variables produced by the kinematics block 118. Blocks 250 and 252 direct the master apparatus 64 to use the methods described below to perform the calculations required to determine, relative to the fixed slave reference position 128 and thus in absolute terms within the tool positioning device workspace and end effector workspace, the theoretical locations of each of the tool reference points, namely a first position 230, a second position 232, a third position 234, a fourth position 236 and the end effector position 150, for both the left and right hand tool positioning devices 79 and 81 and end effectors 71 and 73.

[0167] Once the theoretical location of each reference point is determined, the theoretical locations of various intermediate points along the tool positioning devices 79 and 81 within the tool positioning device workspace may then be determined. Each of the sections 220, 222 of the s-segment 130 and the distal segment 132 of the tool positioning devices 79 and 81 is comprised of a plurality of the identical “vertebra” 224 generally extending between first position 230 and fourth position 236 and the centers of the vertebrae are spaced apart by the same distance, and the intermediate points are defined as a position at the center of each identical vertebra of respective tool positioning devices 79 and 81. Since the s-segment 130 and distal segments 132 form smooth continuous constant-radius curves when bent, the theoretical location of the center of each vertebra can be calculated mathematically.

[0168] For example, for any given tool positioning device 79 or 81, the theoretical location of the first position 230 reference point relative to the fixed slave reference position 128 can be determined through simple addition of the q_{ins} configuration variable determined by the kinematics block 118 to the fixed slave reference position 128 in the z_v axis, as the q_{ins} generally represents an unbendable portion of the tool positioning device. Determining the vector from the fixed slave reference position 128 to the first position 230 (

$\bar{F}_{1/v}$) will provide a theoretical location of the first position **230** in absolute terms within the tool positioning device workspace.

[0169] Once the theoretical location of the first position **230** is determined, the theoretical location of all vertebrae **224** in the first section **220** of the s-segment **130**, namely from the first position **230** to the second position **232**, can be determined. For example in the embodiment shown in FIG. 9, assuming there are 15 vertebrae **224** in the first section **220**, extending from the first position **230** to the second position **232**. The center of the n^{th} vertebrae of the first section **220** would lie at a theoretical location that is at an intermediate point along the first section **220**, and the intermediate point can be calculated as

$$n * \frac{1}{15} * \theta_{prox}$$

relative to the first position **230** reference point. A vector from the first position **230** to the n^{th} vertebra position can then be determined. Adding the vector from the first position **230** to the n^{th} vertebrae to the vector from the fixed slave reference position **128** to the first position **230** ($\bar{F}_{1/v}$) will arrive at the theoretical location of the vertebrae of the first section **220** in absolute terms in the positioning device workspace, relative to the fixed slave reference position **128**. This procedure is done for each of the 15 vertebrae in the first section **220** of the s-segment **130** to find the theoretical location relative to the fixed slave reference position **128** for each of the vertebra **224** of the first section **220** within the tool positioning device workspace.

[0170] Additionally, for any given tool positioning device **79** or **81**, the theoretical location of the second position **232** reference point relative to the fixed slave reference position **128** can be determined from the configuration variables q_{ins} , θ_{prox} and δ_{prox} . Determining a vector from the fixed slave reference position **128** to the second position **232** ($\bar{F}_{2/v}$) will provide a theoretical location of the second position **232** in absolute terms within the tool positioning device workspace.

[0171] Once the theoretical location of the second position **232** is determined, it is used as the reference point for the determination of the theoretical location of all vertebrae intermediate points in the second section **222** of the s-segment **130**, namely extending from the second position **232** to the third position **234**. For the embodiment of the tool positioning device **81** shown in FIG. 9, assuming again that there are 15 vertebrae in the second section **222**, the center of the n^{th} vertebrae of the second section **222** would lie in an intermediate point along the second section **222**. The angle the second section **222** is bent in the first bend plane δ_{prox} is equal and opposite to the angle θ_m , used for the calculations concerning the vertebrae of the first section **220**. Therefore, intermediate point of the n^{th} vertebrae can be calculated as

$$n * \frac{1}{15} * -\theta_{prox}$$

relative to the second position **232**. Adding the vector from the second position **232** reference point to the n^{th} vertebra to the vector from the slave reference position **128** to the second position **232** ($\bar{F}_{2/v}$) will provide the theoretical location of the n^{th} vertebrae of the second section **222** in

absolute terms within the tool positioning device workspace. This procedure is done for each of the 15 vertebrae in the second section **220** of the s-segment **130** to find the absolute positions for each vertebrae intermediate point within the tool positioning device workspace, relative to the fixed slave reference position.

[0172] Additionally, for any given tool positioning device **79** or **81**, the theoretical location of the third position **234**, which is at the end of the s-segment **130**, can be expressed by a vector $\bar{F}_{3/v}$ defined by the following vector components expressed relative to the fixed slave reference position:

$$\bar{p}_{3/v} \cdot \bar{i} = \frac{-L_1 \cos \delta_{prox} (\sin \theta_{prox} - 1)}{\frac{\pi}{2} - \theta_{prox}} \quad (8a)$$

$$\bar{p}_{3/v} \cdot \bar{j} = \frac{L_1 \sin \delta_{prox} (\sin \theta_{prox} - 1)}{\frac{\pi}{2} - \theta_{prox}} \quad (8b)$$

$$\bar{p}_{3/v} \cdot \bar{k} = q_{ins} + \frac{L_1 \cos \theta_{prox}}{\frac{\pi}{2} - \theta_{prox}} \quad (8c)$$

[0173] Once the theoretical location of the third position **234** is determined, it can be used as the reference point to determine the theoretical location of all vertebrae **224** in the distal segment **132** using the method provided above. Assuming that there are 15 vertebrae in the distal segment **132**, the center of the n^{th} vertebrae would lie in an intermediate point that is along the distal segment **132**. The angle the distal segment **132** is bent in the second bend plane δ_{dist} is θ_{dist} . Therefore, the intermediate point of the n^{th} vertebrae can be calculated as

$$n * \frac{1}{15} * \theta_{dist}$$

relative to the third position **234**. Adding the vector from the third position **234** reference point to the n^{th} vertebra intermediate point in the distal segment **132** to the vector from the fixed slave reference position **128** to third position **234** ($\bar{F}_{3/v}$) will arrive at the theoretical location of the n^{th} vertebrae in the distal segment **132** in absolute terms in the tool positioning device workspace. This procedure is done for each of the 15 vertebrae in the distal segment **132** to find the theoretical location for each vertebrae intermediate point in the tool positioning device workspace in absolute terms, relative to the fixed slave reference position **128**.

[0174] Further, the theoretical location of the fourth position **236** reference point can be determined as a vector relative to the third position **234** ($\bar{F}_{4/3}$) according to the following vector component relations, as previously presented:

$$\bar{p}_{4/3} \cdot \bar{i} = \frac{-L_2 \cos \delta_{dist} (\sin \theta_{dist} - 1)}{\frac{\pi}{2} - \theta_{dist}} \quad \bar{p}_{4/3} \cdot \bar{j} = \frac{-L_2 \cos \delta_{dist} (\sin \theta_{dist} - 1)}{\frac{\pi}{2} - \theta_{dist}} \quad (6a)$$

$$\bar{p}_{4/3} \cdot \bar{j} = \frac{L_2 \sin \delta_{dist} (\sin \theta_{dist} - 1)}{\frac{\pi}{2} - \theta_{dist}} \quad (6b)$$

-continued

$$\bar{p}_{4/3} \cdot \bar{k} = \frac{L_2 \cos(\theta_{dist})}{\frac{\pi}{2} - \theta_{dist}} \quad (6c)$$

[0175] Adding the vector from the third position **234** reference point to the fourth position **236** reference point ($\bar{F}_{4/3}$) to the vector from the fixed slave reference position **128** to the third position **234** ($\bar{F}_{3/v}$) will arrive at the theoretical location of the fourth position **236** reference point in absolute terms relative to the fixed slave reference position **128** in the tool positioning device workspace.

[0176] Finally, the theoretical location of the end effector position **150** reference point can be determined as a vector relative to the fourth position **236** ($\bar{F}_{5/4}$) according to the following vector component relations, as previously presented:

$$\bar{p}_{5/4} \cdot \bar{i} = L_3 \cos(\delta_{dist}) \cos(\theta_{dist}) \quad (7a)$$

$$\bar{p}_{5/4} \cdot \bar{j} = -L_3 \sin(\delta_{dist}) \cos(\theta_{dist}) \quad (7b)$$

$$\bar{p}_{5/4} \cdot \bar{k} = L_3 \sin(\theta_{dist}) \quad (7c)$$

[0177] Adding the vector from the fourth position **236** reference point to the end effector position **150** reference point ($\bar{p}_{5/4}$) to the vector from the third position **234** reference point to the fourth position **236** reference point ($\bar{p}_{4/3}$) and to the vector from the fixed slave reference position **128** to the third position **234** reference point ($\bar{p}_{3/v}$) will arrive at the theoretical location of the end effector position **150** in absolute terms relative to the fixed slave reference position **128** in the end effector workspace.

[0178] Following calculation of the theoretical location of reference position points and intermediate vertebra points of the left and right tool positioning devices **79** and **81** and end effectors **71** and **73** at blocks **250** and **252**, block **254** of the feedback force control block **122** directs the master apparatus **64** to calculate the distance between each reference point and intermediate point associated with the left-hand tool positioning device **79** and each reference point and intermediate point associated with the right-hand tool positioning device **81**. This is done simply by the following vector calculation:

$$d = |\bar{p}_L - \bar{p}_R|, \quad (14)$$

[0179] where:

[0180] \bar{p}_L is a vector to the point of interest, defined as either a reference point or an intermediate point, on the left tool positioning device **79** or left end effector **71**;

[0181] \bar{p}_R is a vector to the point of interest, defined as either a reference point or an intermediate point, on the right tool positioning device **81** or right end effector **73**; and d =calculated distance.

[0182] Upon calculating the distances between all left points of interest associated with left tool positioning device **79** and all right points of interest associated with the right tool positioning devices **81**, block **256** then directs the master apparatus **64** to determine whether any calculated distance between any two points of interest on the separate tool positioning devices **79** and **81** meets a proximity criterion. In this embodiment, the proximity criterion is whether the calculated distance between the two points of interest is less than a threshold distance (TH). Specifically, as illustrated in FIG. **12**, the proximity criterion is not met

when the calculated distance between the two points of interest is greater or equal to the threshold distance and, as illustrated in FIG. **13**, the proximity criterion is met when the calculated distance between the two points of interest is less than the threshold distance. The threshold distance may be set relative to the diameters of the tool positioning devices. In one embodiment the threshold distance may be set to a distance of no less than 1 diameter of the tool positioning devices **79** and **81** since the tool positioning devices physically cannot assume a pose where their axes are spaced closer than 1 diameter. A safe threshold may be about 2 tool holder diameters, for example.

[0183] It will be appreciated that the signals representing newly calculated end effector positions \bar{F}_{EENEW} and orientation R_{EENEW} for any two tool positioning devices **79** and **81** may specify end effector positions for each end effector **71** and **73** associated with the tool positioning devices that seek to pose the two tool positioning devices such that two points would physically occupy the same theoretical location in space at the same time (“coincide”) or place a point on the right tool positioning device **81** to the left of the left tool positioning device **79** (“cross”). Of course, these are not positions that can actually be attained because, physically, two points cannot occupy the same location in space at the same time nor can one tool positioning device penetrate the solid matter of the second tool positioning device. However, the theoretical locations of points of interest along each tool positioning device calculated by the feedback force control block **122** can define coinciding positions or crossing positions.

[0184] In any situation where any theoretical location of one point on the left tool positioning device **79** or end effector **71** is closer to the theoretical location of one point on the right tool positioning device **81** or end effector **73** than the threshold distance and thus meet the proximity criterion, the two points are said to “overlap”. There may be different degrees of overlap, calculated from the amount of difference between the calculated distance between the two points and the threshold distance (the “overlap distance”), for example.

[0185] If any calculated distance between two points on the tool positioning devices **79** and **81** or end effectors **71** and **73** overlap in the embodiment shown in FIG. **10**, block **258** directs the master apparatus **64** to calculate a haptic force magnitude and direction dependent on the degree of overlap. In other embodiments, block **258** may direct the master apparatus **64** to produce a visual or audio annunciation signal.

[0186] The magnitude of the haptic force may be determined using a defined function of the overlap distance between the point of interest on the left tool positioning device **79** and end effector **71** and the point of interest on the right tool positioning device **81** and end effector **73**. For example, the force magnitude may be proportional to the square of the overlap distance multiplied by a scaling factor. For example, the magnitude of the haptic force may be calculated according to the relation:

$$F = 0.35(\text{overlap distance})^2. \quad (15)$$

[0187] The direction of the haptic force may be determined by computing a unit vector normal to a point of contact, where the point of contact is defined as the point midway along the vector between \bar{p}_R and \bar{p}_L when the distance between \bar{p}_R and \bar{p}_L is equal to the threshold distance.

For example, the force direction can be computed using vector addition. The force direction on the right tool positioning device **81** and end effector **73** may be computed by subtracting the vector to the point of interest on the left instrument (\bar{p}_L) from the vector to the point of interest on the right instrument (\bar{p}_R), and then normalizing to give a unit vector \bar{e}_R by the relation:

$$\bar{e}_R = \frac{\bar{p}_R - \bar{p}_L}{|\bar{p}_R - \bar{p}_L|} \quad (16)$$

[0188] In one embodiment; the force direction on the left tool positioning device **79** and end effector **71** may be in the opposite direction to the force direction on the right tool positioning device **81** and end effector **73** so that to the operator, the forces presented by input devices **58** and **60** are equal but opposite, thus simulating contact between the tool positioning devices **79** and **81**.

[0189] Block **260** then directs the master apparatus **64** to produce a feedback signal for receipt by the control unit **92**. In this embodiment the feedback signal causes the control unit **92** to produce a haptic force detectable by the operator, to indicate to the operator that the tool positioning devices are in close proximity. For example, the feedback signal may include a representation of the magnitude of haptic force to be felt by the operator in equal and opposite directions normal to the contact tangent plane so as to feel to the operator as though the instruments are touching one another. Alternatively, the feedback signal can be used to produce display control signals for causing the viewer **62** in FIG. 1, for example to show the closest points of approach on the left and right tool positioning devices **79** and **81**. For example, referring to FIG. 11, the view can show the left tool positioning device as a first circle **244**, the right tool positioning device as a second circle **246** and a line **242** between the first and second circles representing the nearest distance calculated by block **256**. After the feedback signal is sent to the control unit at block **260**, the feedback force control block **122** is then ended.

[0190] If, at block **256**, none of the calculated distances between two points are less than the threshold distance, i.e. they are all equal to or more than the threshold distance, then block **260** of feedback force control block **122** directs the master apparatus **64** send a feedback signal that causes the input device to stop causing haptic force to be produced based on collision detection. If no other feedback producing systems are requesting haptic force feedback, the master apparatus **64** produces a feedback signal for receipt by the control unit **92** to cause the control unit to cease producing any haptic force previously detectable by the operator, indicating to the operator that the tool positioning devices **79** and **81** are not in close proximity. The feedback force control block **122** is then ended.

[0191] In response to the feedback signal from the master apparatus **64** to produce the haptic force, the control unit **92** presents a haptic force to the arms **94**, **96**, **98**, to impede movement of the handle **102**, and in the embodiment shown, the magnitude of haptic force is set depending on the degree of overlap by which the calculated distance between any two points on the left and right tool positioning devices **79** and **81** and the end effectors **71** and **73** is less than the threshold distance. In response to the feedback signal from the master apparatus **64** to cease producing haptic force, the control unit

92 ceases to present a haptic force to the arms **94**, **96**, **98**, thus allowing movement of the handle **102**.

Motion Control Block

[0192] The motion control block **120** shown in FIG. 6 includes codes that direct the master apparatus **64** to produce the slave control signals, in response to the configuration variables. The motion control block **120** uses the configuration variables produced by the kinematics block **118** to produce control wire length values by applying transfer functions to the calculated configuration variables to determine required wire lengths. Such transfer functions can be derived theoretically and/or empirically, for example, for the specific tools used. The motion control block **120** is also responsive to the “new” signal provided by the end effector position and orientation calculator block **116** of FIG. 6 and controlled by blocks **215** and **163** of FIG. 8.

[0193] Referring to FIG. 8, an active “new” signal is produced by block **215** of the end effector position and orientation calculation block **116** when the enablement signal is active and causes the present control wire length values to be represented by the slave control signals. An inactive “new” signal is produced by block **163**, when the enablement signal is not active and when the enablement signal is active but the alignment error is not less than the threshold, and causes the previous control wire length values to be represented by the slave control signals.

CONCLUSION

[0194] The above described system is a robotic control system comprising a master apparatus **64** in communication with a plurality of input devices **58** and **60** having respective handles **102** and **105** capable of translational and rotational movement and a slave subsystem having a tool positioning device **79** and **81** corresponding to each respective handle, each tool positioning device **79** and **81** holding a respective tool **66** and **67** having an end effector **71** and **73** whose position and orientation is determined in response to a position and orientation of the respective corresponding handle.

[0195] The master apparatus **64** contains at least one processor circuit, the at least one processor circuit configured by the blocks shown in FIGS. 6-8 and **10** to cause the at least one processor to execute a method of operating the robotic control system to detect potential collisions between any of the tool positioning devices **79** and **81** and their respective end effectors **71** and **73**, which may be part of the slave subsystem **54**. In the embodiments shown, there are two tool positioning devices **79** and **81** and respectively, two end effectors **71** and **73**, it being understood that there may be more than two tool positioning devices and end effectors in other embodiments.

[0196] In general the method involves causing the at least one processor circuit associated with the master apparatus **64** to produce desired new end effector positions and desired new end effector orientations of the respective end effectors **71** and **73**, in response to current positions \bar{p}_{MCURR} and current orientations R_{MCURR} of corresponding respective handles **102** and **105**. The at least one processor circuit is caused to use the desired new end effector positions and orientations \bar{p}_{EENEW} and R_{EENEW} to determine the pose of the tool positioning devices **79** and **81** and from there, calculate the distances from each point of a first plurality of

points along the first tool positioning device **79** to each point of a plurality of points along at least one other tool positioning device **81**. The at least one processor circuit is then caused to determine whether any of the calculated distances meets a proximity criterion and to notify the operator when the proximity criterion has been met.

[0197] Causing the at least one processor circuit to notify the operator tool positioning devices **79** and **81** meets a proximity criterion may include causing the at least one processor circuit to signal the input devices **58** and **60** associated with the handles **102** associated with the tool positioning devices **79** and **81**, to cause the handles **102** associated with the tool positioning devices **79** and **81** associated with the calculated distance that meets the proximity criterion to present haptic feedback to the operator, the haptic feedback impeding movement of the handles in a direction that would shorten the calculated distance between the tool positioning devices **79** and **81** that meets the proximity criterion.

[0198] Alternatively or in addition, causing the at least one processor circuit to notify the operator may include causing the at least one processor circuit to produce annunciation signals for causing an annunciator to annunciate that the proximity criterion has been met and this may involve causing the at least one processor circuit to produce display control signals for causing the LCD display **68** to depict a visual representation indicative of the distance that meets the proximity criterion and/or causing the at least one processor circuit to produce audio control signals for causing an audio device to provide an audible sound indicative of the distance that meets the proximity criterion.

[0199] In the embodiments described, the at least one processor circuit may be configured to cause the input devices **58** to cease producing haptic feedback, to produce annunciation signals to cause an annunciator to cease to annunciate that a proximity criterion has been met, or to enable movement of the tool positioning devices **79** and **81** associated with the distance that met the proximity criterion when the calculated distance no longer meets the proximity criterion.

[0200] In the further alternative or in further addition, the at least one processor circuit may be configured to then disable movement of all tool positioning devices **79** and **81** associated with a distance that meets the proximity criterion.

[0201] Causing the at least one processor circuit to disable movement of all tool positioning devices **79** and **81** associated with the any distance that meets the proximity criterion may involve causing the at least one processor circuit to transmit control signals to respective slave subsystems **54** associated with the tool positioning devices **79** and **81** associated with the calculated distance that meets the proximity criterion, each control signal identifying a current end effector position and orientation based on a current position and orientation of the corresponding handle when the proximity criterion is not met and causing the at least one processor circuit to cause the control signals transmitted to the slave subsystems **54** associated with the tool positioning devices **79** and **81** associated with the calculated distance that meets the proximity criterion to identify a previous position (\bar{F}_{EEBASE}) and orientation (R_{EEBASE}) of associated respective end effectors **71** and **73** when the proximity criterion is met.

[0202] Producing the desired new end effector position and desired new end effector orientation and may involve

causing the at least one processor circuit to receive from each input device **58** and **60** current handle position signals (\bar{F}_{MCURR}) and current handle orientation signals (R_{MCURR}) representing a current position and a current orientation respectively of the handle **102** of the corresponding input devices and causing the at least one processor circuit to produce, for corresponding tool positioning devices **79** and **81**, new end effector position signals (\bar{F}_{EENEW}) and new end effector orientation signals (R_{EENEW}) defining the desired new end effector position and the desired new end effector orientation, respectively of the end effectors **71** and **73**, in response to the corresponding current handle position signals (\bar{F}_{MCURR}) and the current handle orientation signals (R_{MCURR}).

[0203] Causing the at least one processor circuit to receive the current handle position signals \bar{F}_{MCURR} and the current handle orientation signals R_{MCURR} may involve causing the at least one processor circuit to periodically receive the current handle position signals and the current handle orientation signals.

[0204] The method may further involve causing the at least one processor circuit to receive an enablement signal controlled by the operator and causing the at least one processor circuit to detect a change in state of the enablement signal. When the change is detected the at least one processor may be caused to store the current handle position signals (\bar{F}_{MCURR}) and the current handle orientation signals (R_{MCURR}) as master base position signals (\bar{F}_{MBAS}) and master base orientation signals (R_{MBASE}) respectively; and store the new end effector position signals (\bar{F}_{EENEW}) and the new end effector orientation signals (R_{EENEW}) as end effector base position signals (\bar{F}_{EEBASE}) and end effector base orientation signals (R_{EEBASE}) respectively.

[0205] Causing the master apparatus **64** to produce the new end effector position signals (\bar{F}_{EENEW}) and the new end effector orientation signals (R_{EENEW}) may involve causing the master apparatus **64** to compute the new end effector position signals and the new end effector orientation signals according to the following relations:

$$\bar{F}_{EENEW} = A(\bar{F}_{MCURR} - \bar{F}_{MBAS}) + \bar{F}_{EEBASE}; \text{ and} \quad (1a)$$

$$R_{EENEW} = R_{EEBASE} R_{MBASE}^{-1} R_{MCURR} \quad (1b)$$

[0206] Each of the tool positioning devices **79** and **81** may include a plurality of segments **130** and **132** each comprised of a plurality of vertebrae **224** and at least some of the points in each of the plurality of points may be points on a respective segment or vertebrae of a segment **130** and **132**.

[0207] The method may involve, for each tool positioning device **79** and **81**, causing the at least one processor circuit to compute vectors from a reference point associated with the tool positioning devices **79** and **81** to a point on a segment of the tool positioning device, based on the desired new end effector position and orientation calculated for the end effector associated with the tool positioning device.

[0208] The method may further involve causing the at least one processor circuit to compute a position of at least one vertebrae associated with the segment, based on the position of the point on the segment.

[0209] While specific embodiments of the invention have been described and illustrated, such embodiments should be considered illustrative of the invention only and not as limiting the invention as construed in accordance with the accompanying claims.

1. A method of operating a robotic control system comprising a master apparatus in communication with a plurality of input devices including respective handles capable of translational and rotational movement and a slave system including a tool positioning device corresponding to each respective handle, each tool positioning device holding a respective tool including an end effector whose position and orientation is determined in response to a position and orientation of a corresponding said handle, the method comprising:

by at least one processor circuit associated with the master apparatus, producing desired new end effector positions and desired new end effector orientations of respective said end effectors, in response to current positions and current orientations of corresponding respective handles;

by the at least one processor circuit, using said desired new end effector positions and orientations to determine distances from each point of a first plurality of points along a first tool positioning device to each point of a plurality of points along at least one other tool positioning device;

by the at least one processor circuit, determining that any of said distances meets a proximity criterion; and

by the at least one processor circuit, notifying an operator of the handles associated with tool positioning devices associated with said any distance that meets said proximity criterion to indicate that said proximity criterion has been met.

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10. (canceled)

11. (canceled)

12. (canceled)

13. (canceled)

14. (canceled)

15. (canceled)

16. A non-transitory computer readable medium encoded with codes for directing a processor circuit to execute the method of claim 1.

17. An apparatus for use in a robotic control system, the apparatus in communication with a plurality of input devices including respective handles capable of translational and rotational movement and the robotic control system comprising a slave system including a tool positioning device corresponding to each respective handle, each tool positioning device holding a respective tool including an end effector whose position and orientation is determined in response to a position and orientation of a corresponding said handle, the apparatus comprising:

means for producing desired new end effector positions and desired new end effector orientations of respective said end effectors, in response to current positions and a current orientations of corresponding respective handles;

means for determining distances from each point of a first plurality of points along a first tool positioning device to each point of a plurality of points along at least one

other tool positioning device based on said desired new end effector positions and orientations;

means for determining that any of said distances meets a proximity criterion; and

means for notifying an operator of the handles associated with tool positioning devices associated with said any distance that meets said proximity criterion to indicate that said proximity criterion has been met.

18. (canceled)

19. (canceled)

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23. (canceled)

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26. (canceled)

27. (canceled)

28. (canceled)

29. The apparatus of claim 17 wherein each of the tool positioning devices includes a plurality of segments each comprised of a plurality of vertebrae and wherein at least some of said points in each said plurality of points are points on a respective segment or a vertebrae of a segment.

30. The apparatus of claim 29 further comprising means for computing vectors to points along each tool positioning device from a reference point associated with said tool positioning device to a point on a segment of said tool positioning device, based on said desired new end effector position and orientation calculated for the end effector associated with the tool positioning device.

31. The apparatus of claim 30 further comprising means for computing a position of at least one vertebrae associated with said segment, based on the position of said point on said segment.

32. An apparatus for use in a robotic control system, the apparatus in communication with a plurality of input devices including respective handles capable of translational and rotational movement and a slave system including a tool positioning device corresponding to each respective handle, each tool positioning device holding a respective tool including an end effector whose position and orientation is determined in response to a position and orientation of a corresponding said handle, the apparatus comprising at least one processor circuit configured to:

produce desired new end effector positions and desired new end effector orientations of respective said end effectors, in response to current positions and current orientations of corresponding respective handles;

use said desired new end effector positions and orientations to determine distances from each point of a first plurality of points along a first tool positioning device to each point of a plurality of points along at least one other tool positioning device;

determine that any of said distances meets a proximity criterion; and

notify an operator of the handles associated with tool positioning devices associated with said any distance that meets said proximity criterion to indicate that said proximity criterion has been met.

33. The apparatus of claim 32 wherein the at least one processor circuit is configured to notify the operator by signaling the input devices associated with the handles associated with the tool positioning devices associated with

said any distance that meets said proximity criterion, to cause the handles associated with the tool positioning devices associated with said any distance that meets said proximity criterion to present haptic feedback to the operator, said haptic feedback impeding movement of the handles in a direction that would shorten the distance that meets said proximity criterion.

34. The apparatus of claim **32** wherein the at least one processor circuit is configured to notify the operator by producing annunciation signals for causing an annunciator to annunciate that the proximity criterion has been met.

35. The apparatus of claim **34** wherein said annunciation signals include display control signals for causing a display to depict a visual representation indicative of said distance that meets said proximity criterion.

36. The apparatus of claim **34** wherein said annunciation signal include audio control signals for causing an audio device to provide an audible sound indicative of said distance that meets said proximity criterion.

37. The apparatus of claim **32** wherein the at least one processor circuit is further configured to disable movement of all tool positioning devices associated with said any distance that meets said proximity criterion.

38. The apparatus of claim **32** wherein the at least one processor circuit is configured to disable movement of all positioning devices associated with said any distance that meets said proximity criterion by:

transmitting control signals to respective slave systems associated with said positioning devices associated with said any distance, each said control signal identifying a current end effector position and orientation based on a current position and orientation of the corresponding handle when said proximity criterion is not met; and

causing said control signals transmitted to the slave systems associated with the tool positioning devices associated with the distance that meets said proximity criterion to identify a previous position and orientation of respective said associated end effectors when said proximity criterion is met.

39. The apparatus of claim **38** wherein said at least one processor circuit is further configured to enable movement of the tool positioning devices associated with said any distance that met said proximity criterion when said proximity criterion is no longer met.

40. The apparatus of claim **32** wherein the at least one processor circuit is configured to produce said desired new end effector position and desired new end effector orientation by:

receiving from each input device current handle position signals (\vec{F}_{MCURR}) and current handle orientation signals (R_{MCURR}) representing a current position and a

current orientation respectively of the handle of the corresponding input device; and

producing, for corresponding tool positioning devices, new end effector position signals (\vec{F}_{EENEW}) and new end effector orientation signals (R_{EENEW}) defining said desired new end effector position and said desired new end effector orientation, respectively of the end effector, in response to corresponding said current handle position signals (\vec{F}_{MCURR}) and said current handle orientation signals (R_{MCURR}).

41. The apparatus of claim **40** wherein said at least one processor circuit is configured to receive said current handle position signals and said current handle orientation signals on a periodic basis.

42. The apparatus of claim **32** wherein said at least one processor circuit is configured to receive an enablement signal controlled by the operator and to detect a change in state of said enablement signal and when said change is detected, to:

store said current handle position signals (\vec{F}_{MCURR}) and said current handle orientation signals (R_{MCURR}) as master base position signals (\vec{F}_{MBAS}) and master base orientation signals (R_{MBASE}) respectively; and

store said new end effector position signals (\vec{F}_{EENEW}) and said new end effector orientation signals (R_{EENEW}) as end effector base position signals (\vec{F}_{EEBASE}) and end effector base orientation signals (R_{EEBASE}) respectively.

43. The apparatus of claim **42** wherein said at least one processor circuit is configured to compute said new end effector position signals (\vec{F}_{EENEW}) and said new end effector orientation signals (R_{EENEW}) according to the following relations:

$$\vec{F}_{EENEW} = A(\vec{F}_{MCURR} - \vec{F}_{MBAS}) + \vec{F}_{EEBASE}; \text{ and}$$

$$R_{EENEW} = R_{EEBASE} R_{MBASE}^{-1} R_{MCURR}.$$

44. The apparatus of claim **32** wherein each of the tool positioning devices includes a plurality of segments each comprised of a plurality of vertebrae and wherein at least some of said points in each said plurality of points are points on a respective segment or a vertebrae of a segment.

45. The apparatus of claim **44** wherein said at least one processor circuit is configured to, for each tool positioning device, compute vectors from a reference point associated with said tool positioning device to a point on a segment of said tool positioning device, based on said desired end effector position calculated for the end effector associated with the tool positioning device.

46. The apparatus of claim **45** wherein the at least one processor circuit is configured to compute a position of at least one vertebrae associated with said segment, based on the position of said point on said segment.

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